

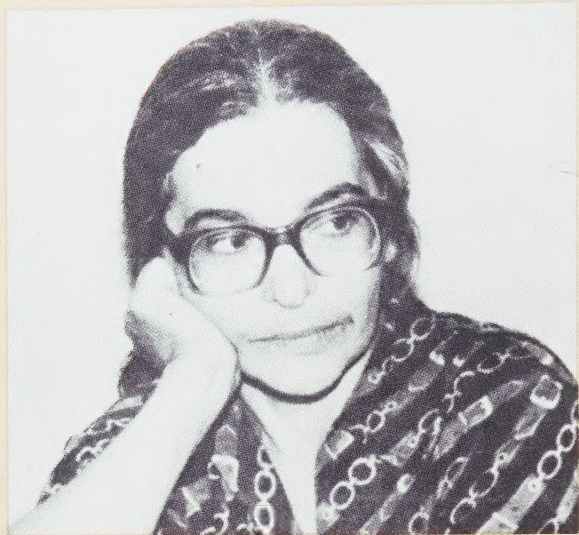
# LILITH

THE JEWISH WOMEN'S MAGAZINE #17 \$3.50 FALL 1987/5748



**Women/Men — Repairing Our Relationships**  
**The Passionate Legacy of a Yiddish Poet**

# FREE



# IDA NUDEL

**If you have not yet signed the Appeal, please contact the magazine for your copy of the petition.**

In issue #16 of LILITH, a Women's Appeal to Raisa Gorbachev on behalf of Ida Nudel, the long-time Soviet refusenik, was launched. Nudel first applied to leave the Soviet Union fifteen years ago.

Recently, the principal Moldavian newspaper, *Soviet-skaya Moldavia*, ran a series of articles denouncing those Jews who wish to leave the country.

After the third such article, Nudel, who is 56 years old, decided to respond. In a letter to British historian Martin Gilbert, she wrote the following:

*There is no point in arguing, rearguing, exposing or denouncing the lies, the invention, the distortions. It is only too well known that the denunciations will not be printed. The conditions are not equal. The Jews can have any dirt thrown at them, any absurd lie told about them, but the courts will not prosecute anyone, the papers will not print any denunciation. Your blood can boil.*

Nudel states that she is concerned, not only for the hundreds of thousand of Soviet Jews

*who have submitted documents for emigration and have become 'non-persons,' are ostracized, and slandered, libelled, harassed and persecuted, and have their dirty linen shaken in public, but also for the hundreds of thousands of Jews who are waiting for a better state of affairs, when it will be possible without fear for their own welfare or for the welfare of their children... to hand in their documents and leave.*

Several hundred LILITH readers have joined the Appeal to date. Their names are recorded on this page. In addition, United States Representatives Patricia Schroeder and Norman F. Lent circulated a petition among their colleagues asking Soviet General Secretary Gorbachev for Nudel's release. Eighty-nine members of Congress signed the petition, which was sent to Gorbachev on May 14.

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## A LILITH SPECIAL REPORT:

Where—and why—the stereotypes about Jewish women are still flourishing. How they've damaged our self-esteem *and* relations between the sexes.

### 6 "JAP"—BAITING ON THE COLLEGE SCENE by Sherry Chayat

An epidemic of graffiti, an explosion of verbal abuse in public places, women afraid to stand up in a football stadium because of the catcalls. The place is the college campus. The target is the "Jewish American Princess."



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by Judith Allen Rubenstein

How faculty, students and administration responded to the spring offensive against Jewish women on one campus.



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Frigid/promiscuous, dependent/aggressive—students grapple with the contradictions of the "JAP" myth. Plus: *Francine Klagsbrun* on why the anti-Semitic "JAP" stereotype is popular among Jews now.

### 12 READING THE WRITING ON THE WALL by Claudia Koonz

As the Nazis consolidated their power in the 1930's, German Jewish women sensed the threat sooner and saw it as more dangerous than the men did. Historian Koonz sorts out the reasons.

### 15 JEWISH WOMEN/JEWISH MEN— DETOXIFYING OUR RELATIONSHIPS an interview with Esther Perel by Susan Weidman Schneider

Many Jews see themselves (and each other) as asexual and passionless. Ethnotherapist Perel tells why these and other negative in-group images and ambivalent feelings about Jewish identity lead Jewish women and men to reject each other.

### 20 MOTHER NATURE AND HUMAN NATURE: THE POETRY OF MALKA HEIFETZ TUSSMAN an appreciation by Marcia Falk

One of the many gifted women of her generation writing in Yiddish, Tussman—who died last spring at 91—is remembered here by a younger poet. An added attraction: Falk's translation of Tussman's poetry.

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### 32 TAKING THE LAW INTO OUR OWN HANDS

Announcing a new column where women can pose questions about their own lives which they feel require *halachic* (Jewish legal) responses. The religious arbiters creating the answers will be all *women* scholars—a first!

### INSIDE BACK COVER WOMEN'S GALLERY

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LILITH is named for the legendary predecessor of Eve who insisted on equality with Adam: "After the Holy One created the first human being, Adam, He created a woman, also from the earth, and called her 'Lilith.' Lilith said, 'We are equal because we both come from the earth.'" (from *The Alphabet of Ben Sira*, 23a-b)

\*THE PREPARED TABLE takes its title from the English translation of Shulchan Aruch, which has long served as the authoritative code of Jewish behavior according to *halacha* (Jewish law). As Jewish feminists continue to rediscover and rework Jewish tradition, custom and practice, a new egalitarian Prepared Table will emerge. We list here selections from this evolving Prepared Table.

It's ironic. Michael J. Fox, the TV actor and dreamboat to the early adolescent set (and an Anglican) goes on record in *People* magazine as saying, "I'm going to marry a Jewish woman. I'm sure of it.... I have yet to meet one I didn't like. I like women who are funny, independent, hard-working and definitely the family type."

But at the same time, Jewish women have reported the following comments:

- A young Jewish doctor: "I'm pretty sure I won't marry a Jewish woman. I'm looking for somebody who's emotionally appropriate, not like my mother."
- A psychologist who runs a group for divorced women: "They're all *JAPs*, they want everything their way."
- A Jewish man, remarried to a non-Jew: "I'm finished with *JAPs*. Colleen never complains about working hard and taking care of me, the way my Jewish wife did."
- A United Synagogue Youth national newsletter: "Are you a *JAP*? Test your *JAP* IQ.... Do you own 12 or more sweaters ... Calvin Klein jeans ... play tennis ... have your own phone line ... own Porsche sunglasses.... Is your phone bill over \$200 a month?" and so on for a total of 22 questions.

It has become increasingly obvious that the stereotypes are not as harm-

less and ephemeral as we thought ten years ago, when the cover of *LILITH*'s second issue featured the arm of a woman dropping a "Princess" tee-shirt (with a Jewish star dotting the "i") into a garbage can. At the time, we optimistically believed that the changing reality of Jewish women's lives would consign these negative images to the garbage can of history. Instead, what has happened is the opposite: they have gotten a new lease on life. And, even more frightening, reports from college campuses reveal an increasing incidence of stereotyping—moving from nasty jokes and insulting tee-shirts to violent anti-Semitic and misogynist graffiti and verbal violence against women.

In this issue, we try to untangle, from the perspective of 20 years into the second wave of feminism, the underlying causes of the stereotyping, how these images affect the way we feel about ourselves, their impact on relationships between Jewish women and men and between Jews and non-Jews, and the reasons for the recent escalation of both their viciousness and the violent action of those who use them against us.

The evidence in these pages strongly suggests that this is a serious issue which relates to Jewish identity, to the family, and to intermarriage—all questions Jews have been engaged with over the past decade and all of which are affected by this stereotyping. It is time to give it our attention. □

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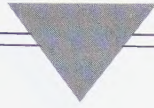
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Dear Editor:

I read in the Summer 1986 LILITH the interview with Pauline Bart on rape with great interest. Her comments were pertinent and perceptive and it was a most informative interview.

However, toward the end she, like many other well meaning feminists, confused fantasy and reality in discussing pornography. She seems to assume that there is a direct link between pornography and rape.

There is no proof that reading or viewing pornographic materials leads to violent sexual behavior on the part of men or women. But Bart shows proof that women who have low self esteem, who defer to men, and who lack "street smarts" are more likely to be raped. That is the reality that Jewish women must face.

A magazine has never raped a woman. A sexually explicit movie has never attacked a woman in her own home. A book of photographs of nudity never jumped on woman as she walked home. Media are protected by the American concept of freedom of expression. We may dislike them. We may choose not to look at them. But we cannot allow hysteria to begin the suppression and censorship of the rights of others to such material.

Trying to suppress what's loosely defined as pornography is a red herring, distracting women from facing the real issues of the world, which include coping with rape, dealing with violence and changing society's laws to protect women from these realities. It's important to differentiate between positive actions to make the world safer and healthier for Jewish women, and negative actions which only lead to a dead end.

**Evelyn Kaye  
Leonia NJ**

#### Pauline Bart Responds:

You speak of the "suppression of what's loosely defined as pornography." The MacKinnon Dworkin anti-pornography ordinance in Minneapolis has an extraordinarily precise definition of pornography, much more precise, for example, than obscenity is in obscenity law or in fact

rape is in rape laws. It gives women INJURED by pornography a cause of action (a legal claim). The material not only must be graphic and sexually explicit but it must also SUBORDINATE WOMEN (or men, transsexuals, or children treated as women) and have at least one of a number of additional characteristics such as women enjoying being raped.

No one has been more critical of current obscenity law than Catherine MacKinnon. The ordinance is sex discrimination law—civil, not criminal law—similar to MacKinnon's brilliant analysis of sexual harassment as sex discrimination, an analysis which has been unanimously upheld by the Supreme Court.

You refer to our work as "a red herring, distracting women from ... coping with rape, dealing with violence and changing society's laws to protect women from these realities." It is *because* of our work in the real world with real women, that we are anti-pornography.

You state that a magazine never raped a woman. The evidence is clear that viewing eroticized violence such as that in slasher films desensitizes men to the harm of rape.

You are defending a 9-billion dollar a year industry that preys upon defenseless runaways among others.

#### CORRECTIONS

The map on the cover of issue #16 and on page 21 is from Martin Gilbert's *The Macmillan Atlas of the Holocaust* © Martin Gilbert 1982. The cover photo came from the library of the YIVO institute for Jewish Research, New York.

The photograph which appeared on page 31 in the Lines of Communication (Letters) section of issue #16 should have been identified as a picture of a *mikvah*. It is included in the book "The Invisible Thread: A Portrait of Jewish American Women" by Diana Katcher Bletter and Lori Grinker, to be published by the Jewish Publication Society this fall.

Dear LILITH:

Both National Council of Jewish Women of Canada and International Council of Jewish Women as well as Hadassah-WIZO of Canada have all campaigned vigorously for several years for the release of Ida Nudel. Please do not assume yours is the first woman's appeal for Ida Nudel.

**Molly Ross  
Vancouver BC  
CANADA**

*[The LILITH Women's Appeal, while certainly not the first effort by women on Nudel's behalf, is unique in that it is also directed to a woman—Raissa Gorbachev, wife of Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev. We hope with this appeal to enlist her help in Ida Nudel's cause. Ed.]*

Dear LILITH:

I was surprised and disappointed in the editors of LILITH and the author of the article, "Comedy and Consciousness" (LILITH #16, page 18), for allowing the use of the word "gypped" in describing the difficulty Joan Rivers had when starting out in comedy.

The verb "gypped," meaning to swindle, cheat or defraud, according to the American Heritage Dictionary, is probably derived from the word "gypsy." Similarly, the verb "to jew," an equally offensive expression, meaning "to best in bargaining by haggling or shrewd practices" derives from the obvious word "Jew."

As Jews and as women who have felt the sting of discrimination, I believe we should be especially sensitive to the use of such derogatory words and therefore should not perpetuate their use, no matter what group of people they are aimed at.

**Sherrill Kushner  
Santa Monica CA**

*[Ms. Kushner is absolutely correct. Gypsies, like Jews, have a long history of suffering oppression, at the hands of the Nazis, among others, and we apologize for the inadvertent slur.]*

## WOMEN IN ISRAEL

### *Can Women's Attendance At Funerals Cause Disasters?*

Recently two chief rabbis of the town of Migdal Haemek in Israel imposed a ban against women attending funerals in that town because this practice was thought to be responsible for the abnormally high number of deaths recently suffered there.

The women were thought to be not observing the religious laws of "family purity," therefore to be "unclean" and unfit to be in the presence of men. (These laws demand that a woman abstain from sexual contact with her husband while menstruating and for some days after, and that she immerse herself in a ritual bath before resuming sexual relations each month.) They were ordered to stand back from the burial and allowed to visit the grave only after the men had left. At one funeral, the women involved included not only friends but the daughters, granddaughters, and sisters of the deceased, who was also a woman.

One of the two rabbis involved, **Rabbi Yitzhak David Grossman**, was quoted as saying, "The public demanded that we do something about all these disasters, and since it is written in the *Zohar* (a 13th century mystical work) that women's attendance at funerals can cause disasters, we decided this was the best course of

*Kol Ishah—"Woman's Voice." Traditionally, the voice of the Jewish woman was not to be heard in public, lest it arouse men. No more. These pages are for news about Jewish women, usually in their own strong voices.*

action." The other rabbi, **Avraham Menahem**, had no comment.

After a flood of protests castigating the rabbis as "primitive and pagan" and "fanatical," Rabbi Grossman declared that his views had been misrepresented in the media.

### **AIDS Offers Impetus To Legalize Prostitution**

As many as 30 percent of prostitutes in Israel carry the AIDS virus, according to recent investigations.

Thus, MK **Ora Namir** appealed for the legalization of prostitution in Israel as a means to control the spread of AIDS and other diseases, as well as out of concern for the health and welfare of prostitutes themselves. Namir, who chairs the Knesset's Labor and Social Welfare Committee, said she spoke to prostitutes, "who, after all, are human beings and deserve protection and rights," and almost all of them favor licensed premises from which they could offer their services in a sheltered, controlled environment.

Namir quoted rabbinical authorities on the recognition of prostitution. She recalled that a Cabinet-appointed committee several years ago recommended legalizing prostitution as a means of controlling it.

## JEWISH DAY CARE—"WHO NEEDS IT?"

Tempers flared at a recent American Jewish Committee conference on day care, after two Jewish communal leaders suggested that day care centers for Jewish pre-school children may not be the answer to child care needs.

Barry Shrage, assistant director of the Jewish Community Federation of Cleveland, stated that most Jewish mothers were middle class and did not work full-time; thus they were not seeking full-day programs. He recommended part-time programs, plus training sessions for nannies and baby-sitters who, he claimed, generally care for Jewish pre-school children

of working mothers.

Stephen D. Solender, executive director, New York Federation-UJA, seconded Shrage's contention and added that these programs were very expensive to fund. He challenged those in attendance to prove from a financial and statistical model that these programs were necessary. He claimed he had never seen statistics to prove that Jewish day care programs were needed.

Sharon Strauss of the Jewish Community Center (JCC) in Washington, D.C., countered that a United Jewish Appeal Federation task force there was indeed completing the very study that Solender was demanding. However, several conference attendees questioned whether JCC teen basketball supported by Federations around the country had ever been subjected to such a needs test.

Norman Finkel, executive director of the Federation Day Care Services of Philadelphia, noted that "Federations are all men and day



care professionals out there are all women," thus leading to a disparity in views. He stressed that the opportunities to provide a Jewish environment for children in day care "can't be compared to a teenager playing basketball at a Y."

Preceding the above exchange, several child care experts had discussed the pivotal nature of Jewish day care in the promotion of a Jewish identity among families. Ruth Pinkenson Feldman found in one study that 63 percent of the parents in Jewish day care versus 17 percent of Jewish parents in non-Jewish day care felt more involved Jewishly than before attendance.

Several other conference speakers mentioned cases of Jewish children attending non-Jewish or church programs. They questioned how the Jewish community could allow this to happen in light of evidence such as Feldman's.

## 80-YEAR-OLD WOMAN BECOMES BAT MITZVAH



Erna Salm, a Chicago octogenarian, receives a hearty mazel tov from Rabbi Leo R. Wolkow as she carries the Torah at her Bat Mitzvah at Temple B'nai Yehuda of Homewood IL. (Photo courtesy CJF)

## Soviet Jewish Women Fight for Refusniks

A group of Jewish women in Moscow has taken the lead in fighting for the release of Prisoners of Conscience and the right of Soviet Jews to emigrate.

The group—"Jewish Women Against Refusal"—are refusniks and the wives of refusniks, many of them trying for more than a decade to obtain exit visas and suffering consequent isolation and hardship.

Jewish Women Against Refusal acted on behalf of **Natan (Anatoly) Shcharansky** and others, and "has

also written to the International Red Cross in Geneva asking that food and clothing be sent to the prisoners and that the world be kept informed of the state of their health and that they are being humanely treated," historian **Martin Gilbert** reported.

One of the signatories, **Elena Dubianskaya**, has been waiting nearly 10 years for an exit permit. Another is **Ida Taratuta** of Lenin-grad, who, with her husband, **Aba**, and son, **Misha**, have been regularly refused exit visas since 1974.

## Women Still Not Integrated as Leaders

A study of 48 Jewish organizations in the Philadelphia area reveals a gradual increase in the percentage of women in the leadership of Federation agencies and coed groups, but no substantive improvements in the employment of women in top executive positions there over the past decade.

At the same time, the study shows "a trend away from the dominance of the counterpart system" in

which the main organization is run by men and there is a women's auxiliary or division. By 1984, the American Jewish Congress had gone coed, and B'nai B'rith was struggling with the issue.

"Bringing Women In" was conducted by Dr. **Rela Geffen Monson**, Professor of Sociology and chairperson of the faculty at Gratz College, as a follow-up of her 1974 study along the same lines. Both were sponsored and made public by the Philadelphia Chapter of the American Jewish Committee.

Monson stressed that "complete integration of  
(Continued on Page 24)



# **JAP-Baiting on the College Scene**

**by Sherry Chayat**

**T**he stereotype of the *JAP*—the Jewish American Princess—is a relatively new phenomenon, emerging after years of Jewish Mother jokes and slurs. But whereas the Jewish Mother has been lampooned as over-anxious, overprotective, and overbearing, her vast capacity for love and self-sacrifice, albeit guilt-producing, has given these jokes an inner core of tenderness; the mockery has been more rueful than vilifying. And perhaps more importantly, although the Jewish Mother has become part of American folklore, jokes about her have been geared toward a predominantly Jewish audience. [The perniciousness of the stereotype, however, can be seen in the events surrounding the firing of an older Jewish woman, chronicled in these pages—Ed.]

The Jewish American Princess, on the other hand, is a stereotype that seems to provoke hostility and aggression; the epithet is used by Jews and non-Jews alike. Even when Jewish

women use it about themselves, it's with a sense of defiance that often seems to mask confusion and chagrin.

"The stereotype of the Jewish American Princess is everything that's considered good about upwardly mobile Jewish males—looking good, being a sexual exploiter, being an achiever," noted Dr. Rela Geffen Monson, a Philadelphia sociologist who conducted a national study of Jewish campus life in 1983 for the American Jewish Committee.

"The Jewish American Princess is living out the role expectations of American society," said Rachel Josefowitz Siegel, a therapist in Ithaca NY. "The *JAP* is the American girl next door who wants to marry the right guy, who dresses according to magazine styles, but in a somewhat exaggerated way. Being more assertive and overt is a trait associated with being Jewish."

Thus the caricature evolves: the girl who drives her Porsche to do her

shopping just five blocks away; the credit cards that spill from her designer purse; the oversized Benetton sweater, the skinny pants tucked into bulky socks and high-top Reeboks; the cascades of jewelry, the expensive perfume, the butterfly clip in the hair; the disdainful glance, the haughty walk, the Long Island accent; the pouting and complaining, the cajoling and manipulating; the obsession, in short, with achieving the status of a precious object.

Most of the young Jewish women on university campuses today are the daughters of parents who have "made it," who have worked hard to live the good life; their feeling is, they've earned the right to show it off.

Up and down the East Coast, at colleges referred to as the Oy Vey League—Boston University, George Washington University, American University, the University of Maryland, the University of Pennsylvania, and the University of Miami among them—young women are teased,

mocked, and baited for looking and acting a certain way.

There's widespread agreement among students on all these campuses about the definition of a *JAP*. The J does stand for Jewish, they say, although many swiftly assert that you don't have to be Jewish to be a *JAP*. The A, of course, is American—no hesitation here. And the P—well, the truth is, few princes get “*JAP*ped.” Nearly always, the butt of the *JAP* joke is female.

To many non-Jews, Jew and *JAP* are synonymous. “At Boston University, everyone uses the term *JAP*, but different people attach different meanings,” said Lori Rubenstein, who graduated this past June. “Non-Jews use it in a derogatory way. I’ve seen some ‘I hate *JAPs*’ graffiti. And sometimes people scream ‘*JAP*’ when you’re just walking down the street. But a lot of Jews who are called *JAPs* just think everyone’s jealous.”

At American University in Washington DC, sometimes referred to as “American Jew” by its undergraduates, two Jewish male student disk jockeys sponsored a “Biggest *JAP* on Campus” contest. One of the national Jewish fraternities there, ZBT, is known as Zionist Bankers Trust; the corresponding sorority, SDT, as “Spend Daddy’s Tuition.” One of the most popular tee-shirts reads “Slap a *JAP*.”

“The kids who feel they can’t keep up, that they don’t have the cars, that their clothes aren’t stylish enough, they’re the ones who resent *JAPs* the most,” said Elizabeth Spencer, a student at American. “Non-Jews perceive all Jews as *JAPs*.”

At George Washington, too, *JAPs* are seen as status-conscious show-offs. Laura Holland, a graduate student there, claims that the materialistic system of values of the *JAPs* is found offensive by Jews and non-Jews alike. But most non-Jews think they represent all Jews.

At Cornell University, the joke goes, “What’s the difference between a Syracuse University *JAP* and a Cornell *JAP*? 300 SAT points.” Two years ago, a fraternity set up two booths. In one, an inflated life-size doll bearing the sign “Slap a *JAP*” was positioned; sponges were offered to all who cared to hurl them. At another, a large female head with an open mouth was featured. Here, the sign urged, “Make her prove she’s not a *JAP*—Make her swallow.”

The desks and walls of the carrels at Syracuse University’s Bird Library are covered with anti-*JAP* graffiti. Everywhere on campus students, Jewish and non-Jewish alike, wear *JAP*-buster tee-shirts. (See separate story on recent events at Syracuse University, in these pages.) At the University of Pennsylvania, on the other hand, the only students wearing such tee-shirts were Jewish men, according to June graduate Judy Siegel.

At both Syracuse and the University of Michigan at Ann Arbor, outright anti-Semitic sentiments are being expressed openly. Inscriptions reflecting the views of Arab students and of right-wing, white supremacist and pro-Aryan hate groups—such as the words “Do Not Tolerate the Hebrew Menace” surrounded by swastikas—abound in Syracuse. A typical joke making the rounds at Ann Arbor is, “Why is a Jew like a pizza? They both belong in the oven.”

“These days, the anti-*JAP* graffiti

have been replaced with vile anti-Semitic slogans,” said Tikva Frymer-Kensky, a visiting associate professor in the women’s studies department. “People no longer feel the need to hide an anti-Semitic comment behind a *JAP* joke.”

“Like the gays and the feminists, as long as they kept quiet, Jews were O.K.,” noted Reinhold Aman, publisher of *Maledicta*, a Wisconsin periodical that tracks varieties of verbal abuse. “When Jews become more obvious, when they deviate from the ‘norm,’ they’re seen as obnoxious.” □

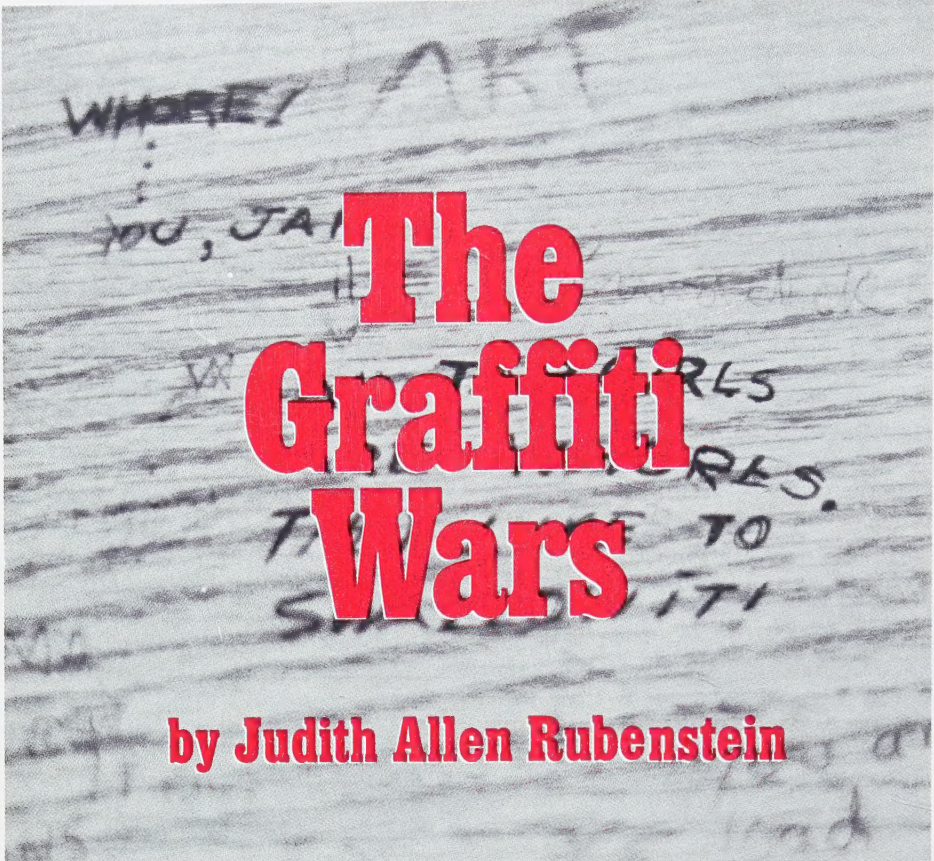
*Sherry Chayat’s articles have appeared in Present Tense, Art in America, ArtNews, Syracuse University Alumni News, and elsewhere. She is the art critic for the Syracuse Herald-American, and is former editor-in-chief of the Syracuse Jewish Observer. She teaches courses in contemporary art at University College, Syracuse University.*

## The Ten Best

### Legendary Classics J.A.P. Jokes

1. What’s the difference between a J.A.P. and poverty?
2. What does a J.A.P. do with her asshole in the morning?
3. What does a J.A.P. consider to be natural childbirth?
4. How do you know when a J.A.P. is having an orgasm?
5. What’s the difference between a J.A.P. and a canoe?
6. What’s the difference between a J.A.P. and a vulture?
7. What’s the difference between a J.A.P. and Jell-O?
8. What’s a J.A.P.’s favorite position?
9. What do you call a dozen J.A.P.s in the basement?
10. How many J.A.P.s does it take to screw in a light bulb?

A greeting card by Noble Works of New York, one of many playing into the negative stereotypes about Jewish women.



# The Graffiti Wars

by Judith Allen Rubenstein

**S**yracuse University in upstate New York is often called a “JAP school” by students. In recent years, it has become a prime location for JAP-baiting. And this spring the phenomenon became so bad that the university finally had to take official notice.

Syracuse has many attractive female students. Many walk around campus, singly or in groups, stylishly attired in one or another version of the current uniform. Their clothes carry such labels as C.P. Shades, USED, Benetton, Ton Sur Ton, Guess. Oversized hip-length tops are paired with form-clinging leggings. Socks in bright hues, Reebok sneakers, dangling costume earrings and several necklaces complete “the look” of these well-groomed women with their shoulder-length salon-layered hair, long, tapered, manicured fingernails, and expertly applied makeup. But whether they are Jewish, gentile, Black or white is not the determinant for the JAP epithet applied to them

by male students and, not infrequently, by other female students, including their friends.

“As they walk across campus, one can hear mutterings of ‘JAP, JAP, JAP’ or ‘Jew bitch’ following them,” notes Professor Gary Spencer who teaches courses in ethnic minorities and intergroup relations at Syracuse University’s Department of Sociology.

In Syracuse University’s Dome, where more than 30,000 fans may attend any single basketball game, JAP-baiting took on ominous overtones, according to Dr. Spencer. For more than two years, female fans—students and non-students alike—have found themselves the objects of the Dome Chant.

Begun by the university’s Sour Citrus Society, rated as the number one university pep band in the country, the chant would occur during lulls in the game. A trendily clad female walks in front of the student section of the stands. Band members rise, jab a finger at her, and chant, “JAP, JAP.” And “soon, four thousand kids follow,” says Dr. Spencer.

“I’ve talked to co-eds—Jewish and non-Jewish—who were afraid to leave their seats during a game for fear of being ‘JAPped’.... For some it’s humiliating; others think it’s fun and

do it to their friends.”

Dr. Spencer is credited by S.U. officials and students and by Syracuse Jewish community professional and lay leaders with bringing the JAP-baiting phenomenon to their attention. Halting JAP-baiting on college campuses across the country “has become a mission for me,” he says.

Out of deep personal concern and scholarly interest, Dr. Spencer embarked on a social science project this past spring to explore the prevalence and significance of JAP-baiting on the S.U. campus where the total student population numbers 16,000, some twenty-five percent of whom are Jewish.

He set out to spend a day checking the library carrels. The experience was distressing for him. “I planned to spend the morning and the afternoon,” he recalls. “I stayed only twenty minutes because I was physically nauseated. When I left, I was literally shaken.” He was to return several times.

His preliminary analysis of the graffiti yielded five categories: (1) ethnic slur; (2) sexual harassment; (3) anti-Semitic; (4) racist; (5) annihilationist.

Ethnic slurs are aimed primarily at the Greek-letter fraternities and sororities, the *nouveau riche*, JAPs and the university. In this category, Dr. Spencer includes such graffiti as: “JAPs are so good looking, but such bitches”; “SU is not worth the time or money unless you’re some rich JAP looking to get laid and trying to find a husband”; “Solution to the JAP Question: when they go for their nose jobs, have the doctor tie their tubes as well.”

Among the graffiti that Dr. Spencer defines as sexual harassment are: “JAPs Suck But They Don’t Swallow”; “I tolerate JAPs for sex”; “All JAPs are sluts”; “No JAPs? Without them there would be no easy sex!”

“Kikes”; “I HATE JEWS”; “SDT—Rich, Stuckup Jewish Nobodys” are examples of anti-Semitic graffiti found in the library carrels.

The implied violence in the phrases scratched onto the library desks escalates dramatically in the final two groupings. Racist remarks such as “I hate all White people—JAPs and WASPs the most” are a prelude to the annihilationist graffiti: “KILL JEWS”; “Give Hitler another chance”; “This is a warning to American JEWS. We will kill you all!”; “Lebanese resistance. Crush all Israelis and burn them

alive."

Dr. Spencer began his *JAP*-baiting study as an objective researcher. However, following his examination of the anti-Jewish graffiti, he says, "I couldn't be neutral anymore. I'm now engaged in social action research, which allows me to take a stand. I'm more involved in seeing where this goes."

Dr. Spencer designed a pilot study on the subject of *JAP*-baiting, which included formal and informal interviews with students. They were asked to name the "predominantly Jewish fraternities, sororities, dormitories, off-campus housing units and hang-outs," then asked to rank the living quarters in order of "*JAP*ness." Dr. Spencer notes, "No one asked what *JAP*ness is. The students all gave essentially the same ranking."

Almost immediately, a clear pattern of who [*JAP*s] are and where they live emerged. Yet students insisted that *JAP*ness is not "an appearance," but, rather, "an attitude." This attitude is characterized as "showy, obnoxious, materialistic." *JAP*s are reputed to have easy access to "Daddy's credit cards." Long Island was almost universally cited as a breeding ground for *JAP*s.

"I didn't talk to one female dressed in the '*JAP* style' who admitted she was a *JAP*," Dr. Spencer declares. "They insist it [*JAP*ness] is an attitude."

Dr. Spencer presented his findings at an open forum on *JAP*-baiting on the S.U. Campus: Ethnic Slur or Harmless Fun?" April 8. The event's sponsors—the university B'nai Brith Hillel Foundation, its Jewish Studies Program and the sociology department—expected 50 people to attend; 500 showed up.

A few days prior to the forum, Dr. Spencer sent an information packet, including a listing of the graffiti he had catalogued, to faculty and administration officials, asking for their support. "The response that I got from the administration has been absolute, total silence," he says.

Nevertheless, university officials were concerned, although they may have failed to express their interest publicly, according to Dr. Gershon Vincow, the university's vice chancellor for academic affairs. Upon receiving Dr. Spencer's information packet, Dr. Vincow, who characterized the situation as "a serious problem," requested an immediate investigation

be undertaken by the associate vice chancellor of academic affairs, Dr. Michael Flusche.

Although university officials maintained outward silence while examining the complexities of the *JAP*-baiting problem, several faculty members did contact Dr. Spencer before the forum. Many expressed outrage at the graffiti and claimed they were unaware that it existed. "But then they would launch into their own little [*JAP*] anecdotes. They told me, 'I don't care what you say, Gary, there are a lot of *JAP*s here and I don't like it.'"

Many female students do not understand, either, why *JAP*-baiting is generating such interest and con-

cern. "*JAP* doesn't really mean Jewish," one S.U. senior says. Every student queried vehemently denied that any ethnic slur was implied in the use of the term.

Dr. Kermit Schooler, dean and professor in the School of Social Work, admits he "was unaware of the graffiti which was the provocation for the [forum] discussion that Gary Spencer undertook... When the issue gets raised in discussion, one will frequently be told that very often it's the Jewish kids themselves who use the phrase or laugh at the joke."

Expressing distress over this, Schooler—who chairs a university committee to study student behavior which has *JAP*-baiting on its agenda—says they should be educated about why it is demeaning.

Dr. Spencer believes that "it is absolutely necessary that a group outside the university formally make its voice known that it's outraged. I think the appropriate organization to do that is the Syracuse Jewish Federation."

Federation leaders have met with key university administrators to "elicit and understand exactly what their position is," said Barry Silverberg, its executive vice president.

"We look at the issue as not one of *JAP*-baiting, but one of prejudice and anti-Semitism," he says. "It's anti-Jewish. It goes beyond the implicitly anti-feminist issues."

Silverberg said the Federation expects the university will take all appropriate action in this situation.

The university has begun to do so. Its Office of Student Affairs requested the band to cease leading anti-*JAP* chants and, says one highly-placed university official, "the band members have not repeated the action." Also, according to Dr. Vincow, at a meeting with Dr. Flusche, university chancellor Dr. Melvin Eggers, and the allocations committee for funds on renovation, money was earmarked to remove the graffiti. Asked about the amount, Dr. Vincow responded, "A large amount, or whatever it takes to do the job."

The process will begin during the summer. □

### "JEWISH MOTHER FIRED"

Eve Lynn Fertig was fired at age 52 from her job as administrative assistant to the Hillel Foundation director at the State University of New York at Buffalo for being a "Jewish mother."

Hillel Director Rabbi Shabsai Wolfe (who has since left the Buffalo area) said in court in response to Fertig's age discrimination suit that he had used the term "Jewish mother" to describe someone who is "overbearing, talks a lot, smothers people, overassisting."

Fertig had sued B'nai Brith Hillel Foundation, the Hillel Foundation at University of Buffalo Building Corporation, and the United Jewish Federation of Buffalo for age discrimination following her dismissal in August 1977. She lost before U.S. District Court Judge John T. Elfvin on April 11, 1987.

Fertig claimed that Wolfe had stated that her "Jewish mother image" was detrimental to the Hillel House, that it was a "turn-off," that he did not want an "old lady helping the students when he had a young lady to help them." Other witnesses at the trial had testified that Wolfe had stated that he did not need a "Jewish mother image."

Although Fertig, now 62, lost the case, this is only her first battle. Another hearing was scheduled to be held July 1 before the New York State Human Rights Commission to review additional aspects of this case.

*Judith Rubenstein, a free-lance writer based in Syracuse NY, is the editor of the Syracuse Jewish Observer. Her articles have appeared in Jewish newspapers throughout the country.*

# When is a *JAP* not a Yuppie?

## Blazes of Truth

by Susan Schnur

**W**hen I was 12 years old, my parents sent me off to Camp Ramah in the Pocos. That June, I was a dull kid in an undershirt from Trenton, New Jersey, outfitted in lime-green, mix-and-match irregulars from E.J. Korvette's. By the end of August, though—exposed as I was, for two months, to suburban Philadelphia's finest pre-adolescent fashion cognoscenti—I had contracted that dread disease: "*JAPitis*."

Symptoms included not only the perfection of an elaborate, all-day, triple-sink procedure for dyeing white-wool bobby socks to the requisite shade of dirty white (we called it oyster), but also my sudden, ignominious realization that the discount "Beatlemania" record my mother had bought for me the previous spring was not, after all, sung by the real group.

I'm not even sure that the term *JAP* existed yet back then (I don't think it did), but, in any case, by October I was—more or less—cured. I put the general themes of entitlement, of materialism, of canonized motifs (in those days, Lord and Taylor was the label of choice rather than Bloomingdale's) at the back of my mental medicine chest for the next two decades.

It wasn't until six months ago, actually—while teaching a course at Colgate University called "Contem-

porary Issues of Jewish Existence"—that I again gave the subject of *JAPs* a moment's pause.

A unit on *JAPs* was decidedly *not* on my course syllabus (I taught the standards: Holocaust—Faith—Immigration—Assimilation—Varieties of Religious Experience—Humor—Israel—Women). But my students, as it turned out, were obsessed with *JAPs*.

Week after week, in personal journals that they were keeping for me, they talked *JAPs*: the stereotypes, dating them, hating them, not *being* them, *JAP* graffiti, *JAP* competitiveness, *JAPs* who gave them the willies back home in Scarsdale over spring break.

I had been raised on moron jokes; *they* had been raised on *JAP* jokes. ("What does a *JAP* do with her asshole in the morning? Dresses him up and sends him to work.")

Little by little, I came to realize that the *JAP* theme was by no means a one-note samba. It was kaleidoscopic and self-revealing; the students plugged it into a whole range of Jewish issues. I began to encourage them to look at their throwaway *JAP* comments with a measure of scrutiny.

The first, and most striking, ostinato in the students' journals was the dissociative one. As one Jewish student framed it, "There are so many

*JAPs* in this class, it makes me sick." (An astonishing number of students were desperate to let me know this.)

Since over one-third of the class was not Jewish (the enrollment was 30), and since there was no one in the class that I would have identified sartorially as a *JAP*, this was an interesting fillip.

"That's funny," I started commenting back in these students' journals. "The other students think *you're* a *JAP*."

Eventually, one Jewish student wrote, "Maybe when I talk about *JAPs* and that whole negative thing, it's a way for me to get 'permission' to assimilate."

Another wondered why he feels "like every *JAP* on campus somehow implicates me. That's a very 'minority culture' reflex, isn't it? Why am I so hung up on how everyone else perceives Jews?"

Some students perceived the *JAP* phenomenon, interestingly, as a developmental phase in American Judaism—a phase in which one parades both one's success and one's entitlement. "When my best girlfriend from childhood was bat mitzvahed," wrote one student after reading *A Bintel Brief* and *World of Our Fathers*, "her grandmother gave her a 'JAP-in-training' diamond-chip necklace. It's like the grandmother was saying, 'When I was your age, I had to sew plackets in a Lower East Side sweatshop. So you girls be *JAPs*. Take whatever you can and be proud of it.'"

A Black student mentioned—during a talk about the socialization of Jewish women—that Jewish women, like their Black counterparts, are encouraged to be extremely competent, but then are double-bound with the message that their competence must *only* be used for frivolous purposes. (Like Goldie Hawn, in *Private Benjamin*, scolding her upholsterer with impressive assertiveness: "I specifically said—the ottoman in mushroom!", or informing her superior officer that she refused to go to Guam because "my hair will frizz.") "Minority women are warned not to be a real threat to anyone," the student explained, "That's how *JAPs* evolve."

Another theme of the students touched on their perception that Jews are sometimes discriminated against not because they are *less* endowed than others, but because

they are more endowed (smarter, richer, more "connected"). *JAPs*, then, become, in the words of an Irish Catholic student who was doing readings on theology and the theme of chosenness, "the 'chosen of the chosen'." Unlike Irish Catholics who have been discriminated against because we seem 'un-chosen,'" she mused, "people hate *JAPs* because they seem to have everything: money, confidence, style."

Of course, it's probably unnecessary for me to point out that the most prolific *JAP* references had to do with that venerable old feud—the Jewish War-Between-The-Sexes.

One pre-law Jewish male in the class (who was under a lot of pressure and had developed colitis during that semester) stated point-blank that he did not date Jewish women. I was shocked by the number of 20-year-old, seemingly fully-assimilated Jewish males who were right up there with Alexander Portnoy on this subject.

Several students responded to his comment in their journals. "He's angry at *JAPs*," one woman wrote, "because they get to be needy and dependent, whereas the expectations on him are really high."

Another student related the experience of two friends of hers at SUNY Binghamton: "Someone spray-painted the word *JAP* on their dormitory door," she recounted. "But now I wonder—which one of the girls was being called a *JAP*? The one with the dozen Benetton sweaters, or the one who'd gotten 750 on her L-SATs?" The question being, of course, which is ultimately more threatening... the demanding woman or the self-sufficient one?

An Hispanic woman in the class talked about what she called "the dialectic of prejudice"—that is, the contradictory nature of racist or sexist slurs as being, in itself, a diagnostic of irrational bias. "A *JAP* is portrayed as both frigid and nymphomaniacal," she wrote. "She's put down both because

of her haughty strut that says, 'I'm independent', and because of her *kvetching* that says, 'I'm dependent'."

A twist on this theme was provided by a Jewish woman who commented, "Whatever Jewish men call us—cold, hot, leech, bitch—it's all the same thing: They're afraid they can't live up to our standards."

A psych major in the class took a different tack. "It's not that the Jewish male really believes Jewish women are terrible, rather that he simply wants majority culture males to believe it. It's like when territorial animals urinate on a tree," she explained. "It's a minority male's possessive instinct. Like a sign that says, 'Robert Redfords—stay away!'"

Finally, several Jewish students framed their relations with one another in the context of Jewish family systems. "Lashing out at Jewish women—calling them all *JAPs* or refusing to marry them—is a way to get back at the entire high-expectation, high-pressure Jewish family," stated one student in response to a film I showed in class called "Parenting and Ethnicity." "You can lash out by becoming an academic failure," he went on, "or you can become a doctor—which is less self-destructive—and then simply refuse to marry a Jewish woman."

Towards the end of the term, a feminist friend pointed out to me something I had not considered: that the characterizations of *JAPs* and Yuppies are often identical—the difference being, of course, that a Yuppie designation is still generally taken as neutral or even positive, whereas there is hardly one of us left—I don't think—who would compete for the label of *JAP*.

All in all, I trust that the larger lessons in all of these *JAP* ruminations have not been lost on my students. For example: Why has it become socially sanctioned to use a *Jewish* designation (*JAP*) for a description that fits as many Christians as Jews? Or why—along the same lines—is it okay to use a *female* designation (again, *JAP*) for a description that fits as many men as women? Or, sensing what we now sense, shouldn't we refuse any truck altogether with the term *JAP*? □

*Susan Schnur is a rabbi and a writer and has been a Visiting Professor in the Philosophy of Religion Department at Colgate University.*

## JAP: THE NEW ANTISEMITIC CODE WORD

by Francine Klagsbrun

Isn't it odd that the term *JAP*, referring to a spoiled, self-indulgent woman, should be so widely used at a time when women are working outside their homes in unprecedented numbers, struggling to balance their home lives and their work lives to give as much of themselves as they can to everybody—their husbands, their kids, their bosses?

Jewish women, like women throughout society, are trying to find their own paths, their own voices. And, along with other changes that have taken place, they have been finding themselves Jewishly. And yet we hear the term *JAP* being used, perhaps almost more now than ever before. Why?

The new-found, or rather newly-accepted, drive of women for achievement in many arenas threatens many

men. What better put-down of the strong woman than to label her a "Princess"? She is not being attacked as a competitor—that would be too close to home. No—she's called a princess, and that label diminishes her, negating her ambition and her success.

One may note, and rightly so, that there *are* materialistic Jewish women—and men too. But are Jews the only people guilty of excesses in spending? Why should the word "Jewish" be used pejoratively to describe behavior we don't approve of?

I think the answer is that there is an underlying antisemitic message in that label. Loudness is somehow "Jewish." Vulgarity is somehow "Jewish." All the old stereotypes of Jews come into play in the use of the term *JAP*. In this day, polite Christian society would not *openly* make anti-Jewish slurs. But *JAP* is O.K. *JAP* is a kind of code word. It's a way of symbolically winking, poking with an elbow, and saying, "well you know how Jews are—so materialistic and pushy."

What is interesting is that this code word can be used in connection with women—the Jewish American Princess—and nobody protests its intrinsic antisemitism.

*Francine Klagsbrun is the author of Married People: Staying Together in the Age of Divorce (New York: Bantam, 1985) and of Voices of Wisdom: Jewish Ideals and Ethics for Everyday (New York: Pantheon Books, 1980). These excerpts are from a speech delivered by Klagsbrun recently at Temple Israel of Great Neck NY.*



# Reading the writing on the wall



by Claudia Roonz

**S**hortly after I began working on an oral history project to record women's reactions to Nazi Germany, the material I had gathered led me to research the quite different reactions of Jewish men and Jewish women to the issues of escape, self-defense, conformity, rebellion, and planning for the future. I suggest that men and women evaluated their situation from contrasting perspectives—specifically that 1) they experienced antisemitism differently and 2) that they weighed their options according to different priorities.

Decision-making about emigration seems related to how deeply individuals identified with mainstream society. The more integrated a person felt into the economy and the culture, the less seriously he took Hitler's threats. I say "he" because I suggest that men felt more assimilated into the non-Jewish world than their wives, mothers, sisters and daughters. As a consequence of their lower degree of assimilation, women often perceived the danger of antisemitism earlier than their male counterparts and within the family often urged emigration.

The people in my study (like the leaders of the Jewish community) viewed their alternatives in terms of polarized needs, caught between the psychological necessity to see them-

selves as in control and their future as manageable and the survival instincts which told them that because they had no power, safety lay only in leaving Germany.

Several general conditions formed the background against which Jewish men considered their choices. First, men personally experienced the random and brutal violence of storm-troopers. Until the deportations began, women were treated "chivalrously." Men, by contrast, especially if they were professionals or civil servants, confronted hardship immediately after Hitler's assumption of power.

It might seem, therefore, that the statistical evidence showing the overwhelming predominance of men in the early emigration proved that Jewish men perceived the magnitude of the Nazi threat first and acted. But, in fact, direct attacks affected only a small percentage of all Jewish men. Other values, anchored in masculine socialization, prompted most men to underestimate the threat of remaining in their *Vaterland*.

From boyhood, specific values and experiences conditioned men to view their activities in terms of investment and reward. After devoting decades or a lifetime to his business or position, a man felt he had earned something. His very identity was anchored

in that trade, skill, reputation, income or business. Thus, *a man who believed his conduct to be above reproach, whether wealthy or not, could imagine himself immune from antisemitism.*

A strong identification with a business or institution blinded people to their vulnerability and encouraged them to defend their integrity by remaining in Nazi Germany. Another set of traditions affected men more strongly than women. Boys grew up sharing the patriotism, scholarship, and honor of the *Gymnasium* (and the less elitist *Hochschule*). "You must remember," explained Dr. Robert Salomon, a radiologist who grew up in Belgium and Frankfurt, "that for us *Deutschtum* meant Enlightenment, Goethe, Schiller, Luther, Heine, Kant and Mendelssohn." He did not note Luther's antisemitic statements. "Our families arrived in the Rhineland with Caesar, long before any of those Germanic tribes," he said proudly.

Military service further deepened men's integration into German society. Even young men with one Jewish parent who were drafted into the German army (and not expelled until 1941) recall that the military remained virtually free of the antisemitic comments and insults experienced by *Mischlinge* (those with any Jewish ancestors) in civilian life.

Less easy to document is a final ingredient of decision-making, a faith in orderliness. Believing in the ultimate rationality of the world and in *Planung*, men more than women confidently assumed they could manipulate “the system,” even a Nazi system.

If economic antisemitism so obviously devastated Jewish businesses and property, what factors explain the victims’ hesitation to recognize the hopelessness of their situation? An important segment of the answer lies with the ambiguity of Nazi policies. Ideological differences, disagreements and intra-party rivalries resulted in loopholes, exceptions, and oversights. Even as propaganda blared race-hatred, policy could be read in two ways.

A second factor explaining many businessmen’s reluctance to grasp the hopelessness of their situation lies in the legalistic facade Hitler had perfected during his days as a “respectable” politician. Both victims and perpetrators minimized the seriousness of Hitler’s lethal goals.

Men perceived themselves—and to a formidable extent they *were*—as embedded, not merely in the *Kultur*, but in an entire mesh of social, financial and intellectual traditions, and trusted their ability to manipulate their environment.

*Men, my findings suggest, typically placed greater faith in their non-Jewish friends’ promises of support than did women.* Men identified more deeply with public institutions than women and clung to the hope of a miracle rescue from an increasingly hostile world.

Women’s identity depended upon their family and community. John Stuart Mill once remarked that men choose careers and women choose husbands. Without defending this as an ideal, it nonetheless characterized most women’s expectations during the inter-war years. Generally, girls did not receive as advanced an education as their brothers; often religion, family ties, and friendships played a dominant role in their emotional lives, and although many Jewish women had participated in volunteer war work, they did not share the “front experience,” or join veterans’ associations.

Because women identified as wives and mothers, their perceptions and experiences of antisemitism differed from their husbands’; and when they

considered their options, they came to different conclusions.

Before antisemitism threatened the economic survival of most Jewish men, it pervaded the social networks which played a central role in most Jewish women’s lives. This assertion casts doubt on the convenient assumption that most non-Jews acquiesced to Hitler’s racial madness only when capitulation became absolutely mandatory. Evidence based on memoirs and interviews points to the opposite conclusion—and most dramatically when we listen to women. Social ties proved to be more fragile than business contracts or “crony” networks. Men experienced random violence, but women faced steady erosion of daily life at all levels.

Social antisemitism took effect more quickly than legal and economic antisemitism. At national and local levels, women’s organizations which had long welcomed Jewish women into their work expelled Jewish women overnight. (This applied, too,



*Paula Ollendorf (above) and (l-r, top previous page) Cora Berliner and Hannah Karminsky of the German Jewish community of the 1930's (all photos in these pages courtesy Leo Baeck Institute, New York).*

to women who had converted to Catholicism and Protestantism and did not see themselves as Jewish.) Virtually all member associations of the *Bund Deutscher Frauenvereine* quietly purged their Jewish members without a protest, or even much hesitation. Articles in the *Blätter des Jüdischen Frauenbundes* suggest the ways in which Jewish women encountered antisemitism. The journal carried warnings about non-Jewish servants who might report

“typically Jewish” behavior to local officials. Some authors warned women not to dress ostentatiously and not to reinforce negative stereotypes. And then, the magazine told women to take pride in their Jewish heritage.

In people’s memories it was often these personal and apparently trivial events which sent shock waves through a neighborhood or family. Lilli Kretzmir recalls that the beggar who appeared every Tuesday at the back door for a handout arrived one day with a stiff right arm “Heil Hitler” instead of the humble outstretched palm. Frances Henry recalls the insults hurled at her mother as she walked through the streets with her half-Jewish child.

*“She was walking down a street in Sonderburg, wheeling me, then a very small child, in a baby carriage. On turning a corner, she was accosted by a group of youths who shouted at her, ‘Here comes the dirty whore who goes to bed with a Jew and has the nerve to wheel around her bastard!’”*

The *Gemeinde* (official Jewish Community) contributed to each Jew’s evaluation of the situation, but Jewish public opinion was also formed by experiences in the streets and conversations in the homes. Because antisemitism expressed itself most cruelly in the schools, children often suffered first: and if they reported their trials to a parent, they probably decided to confide in their mothers. After all, it was the mothers who helped children memorize homework—like racial codes, and antisemitic “history.” Magda Meyer-sohn noted in addition that because boys had grown up wrestling and fighting, they withstood harassment better. Girls, by contrast, had lived a sheltered life and suffered from the psychological ostracism by their friends. Ilse Wischnia, who grew up in Rothenburg a. d. O. and Frankfurt, recalls that often boys would beat up Jewish girls on the way to school—aggression for which they were totally unprepared. Her brother had learned to fight back even against overwhelming odds; but the girls felt completely helpless.

Women lived in communities, shops, neighborhoods and towns where they felt acutely what Milena Jesenska called *rufmord*:

*“Death by gossip, by lies, by hostile comments, Nachrede and false alle-*

gations. Rufmord wounds more deeply than steel. You bring a murdered person to the cemetery. There he finds his peace. The victim of rufmord has to keep on living and yet cannot really live."

Men faced direct challenges; women faced the insidious and inexorable erosion of their social world. Therefore, women often felt how precarious their situation was before the men in their families. Often in subtle ways, they "gave the push."

Crisis of any kind typically restructures social arrangements, flattening the power pyramid and diffusing responsibility among the previously powerless. Rising antisemitism in Nazi Germany meant a relative increase in status for women relative to men in the day-to-day work of escape and survival. As public life deteriorated the family took on new emotional meaning as a place of shelter. My informants by and large withdrew from non-Jewish society without approaching Jewish associations. The family provided the kind of "space" for humane values and dignity that activists created within the rubric of Zionist or communal organizations. Without denying that a few young women played leading roles in these organizations, generally men predominated. Most women asserted themselves against adversity within the domestic milieu.

Frequently, too, women used their skills actually to secure their family's exit. Helen Sachs asked me what I thought the most popular book in 1936 Leipzig was among Jews. Not the *Schocken Bücherei*, not even Hermann Hesse, but the New York telephone directory. Women (because they typed and often knew English) searched for Americans with the same last name as theirs in order to write desperate pleas for affidavits. "Some answered," recalls Mrs. Sachs; "but not enough."

Their skills (poorly paid and less specialized) would travel. Home economics, child care, typing, housekeeping, and nursing offered more prospects than, for example, German law or cattle-dealing.

Commonly, too, women profited from Nazi police and Gestapo misogyny by slipping past checkpoints, taking "shopping trips" to Paris or Zürich to procure visas, and smuggling documents. After mass arrests and deportations began, women by



Pauline Maier

definition did most of the courier work because any draft-age man with doubtful papers could be strip-searched on the spot. Besides being less vulnerable to searches, even when searched, women could "pass" because they were not circumcised.

Among those who left Germany, too, differences persisted. Psychologically, women apparently found it easier to "turn the page" and begin a new life abroad. Many children recalled their fathers having died of a broken heart, but did not mention mothers. One of my informants, in discussing her father's suicide, paused to explain why she and her mother did not follow suit. "Kill ourselves? How could a mother leave her kids? Not a possibility!"

Men and women thought about the future from different standpoints.



Otilie Schoenewald

Marta Appel recalled driving home with her husband after a dinner party at which every male guest insisted on remaining in Germany and the women consistently urged emigration. Why? Marta Appel thought because women saw the future—and perhaps the meaning of life—in terms of their children. This suggests, although Frau Appel did not draw the conclusion directly, that *courage for men meant standing fast, defending terrain they had won. Women, by contrast, saw courage as flexibility, risking short-term material setbacks against the hope for their children's happiness.* In other words, men evaluated their milieu in terms of expectations that public order would ultimately provide law-abiding citizens with at least security and possibly leverage. Women grasped better a rapidly disintegrating reality which left Jews helpless.

Lore Jonas recalled that her mother managed to pry her father loose from Germany only by threatening divorce. Daughters or wives consistently urged the family to emigrate against their fathers' judgement.

In every case, my informants assured me that the father made all decisions in the family. "It was not like nowadays. You cannot imagine how totally Papa dominated." During an interview with Ilse Rotschild (who grew up in Karlsruhe and now lives in Worcester), she insisted her father wielded unchallenged authority.

But then she remembered one day in 1938 when her father returned home with plans to remodel the bathroom. Her mother for the first time in anyone's memory "put her foot down," telling her husband: "We will not leave a beautiful new bathroom for the Nazis to use." Shortly thereafter the father decided to accept the invitation by American cousins to immigrate. □

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J E W I S H   W O M E N   J E W I S H   M E N

## DETOXIFYING OUR *Relationships*

Interview with Esther Perel  
by Susan Weidman Schneider

*Esther Perel is a psychotherapist in New York whose teaching and research for the past seven years have focused on issues of ethnicity and identity in Europe, Israel and the U.S. She has led workshops with adolescents and adults on the psychology of Jewish identity and on intermarriage. She recently completed a film documenting her work entitled "Minority on Minority: The Psychodynamics of Black-Jewish Relations."*

### LILITH

Why are so many Jewish women and Jewish men turned off to each other? Why is it that so many Jewish women describe Jewish men as definitely not sexy, Jewish men describe Jewish women as not good in bed...? Why do so many Jewish singles say that they would marry a Jew but they don't want to date Jews?

### PEREL

Jewish men and Jewish women hold a number of stereotypes about each other that makes it harder to relate to each other. As we look at these stereotypes, we see how they are cultivated inside the group, that most of them work as in-group stereotypes, even if they have been taken from stereotypes projected onto Jews from the majority culture. These stereotypes exacer-



Photos by Marilynne Herbert

bate—and sometimes cripple—the relations between Jewish men and women, married or not married.

### LILITH

Let's start with some of the stereotypes Jewish women and men have of each other.

### PEREL

If you look at the general pool of stereotypes about Jewish women, you will see: very good mothers, caring people, strong sense of family. But you will also see: pushy, domineering, materialistic, bitchy, demanding, intrusive, manipulating through guilt, particularly in the sexual realm.

There exists the stereotype of the Jewish woman who is used to being catered to and taken care of; she's seen as too dependent, wanting to be pampered. On the other hand, she's also too assertive, and Jewish men also see her as sexually unattractive and more sexually inhibited. And there's also the "Jewish mother" stereotype: self-sacrificing, smothering, protective.

### LILITH

What are some of the stereotypes of Jewish men?

### PEREL

When I ask participants in my groups, the characteristics they associate with Jewish men are: caring, good providers, stable in their jobs, non-violent, non-alcoholic, strong intellectual ability, thin, but—mothers' boys, lawyers from New Jersey or Long Island, unathletic, nerdish, physically unattractive. Jewish women find Jewish men are "living too much in their heads," and are emotionally absent. There is also a stereotype of a Jewish man who has been groomed for success and provided for and has had life made very easy so that he could then go and study or go out and not have to deal with a whole host of responsibilities; there's a certain element of infantilization and an expectation when

entering marriage that they'll be taken care of.

## LILITH

Why are these images and stereotypes so overwhelmingly negative—and why especially so in the sexual arena?

## PEREL

I often hear from Jewish women in my groups that they struggle to have positive feelings about their Jewishness and their sexuality when bringing these two together... an ambivalence. *Sexuality and Jewishness are two parts of their identity which often stand in conflict with one another.* Jewish men often feel this, too.

## LILITH

Are we saying that the images Jewish women and Jewish men have of *themselves* (not just of one another) are not sexual?

## PEREL

Yes, many do not associate Jewishness with a positive sexual quality. There's a *repertoire of sexual language that is missing* in how they describe themselves. Jewish men rarely employ the attributes of masculine, sexual, hot-blooded, and virile in describing themselves. When Jewish women describe themselves or other women, their descriptions, too, are lacking in sexual attributes about themselves.

## LILITH

What don't you hear from Jewish women that you might expect?

## PEREL

I would expect to hear, from a woman describing herself: sensual, seductive, desirable, attractive, or something related to her female identity.

The sexual part is somehow missing in the way people describe and define themselves, and sex is often a particularly toxic issue with Jewish couples.

## LILITH

Why is it missing?

## PEREL

I don't know the *one* reason why it's missing, but one approach is to

explore the larger religious and historical contexts as well as the family history, its environment and its messages about sexuality. Often the Jewish family is described as a desexualized environment. There is a lot of anxiety and ambivalence about the subject in the home. When sex is not manifest in one's parents' relationship, and when intimacy and sex between the parents are maneuvers for control rather than affection, then it is harder to identify one's own self as sexual. Also, there is a certain reserve in traditional Jewish families around sex.

## LILITH

Do you think that Jewish parents are more fearful about sex, seeing it as an intrusion of the big, bad, non-Jewish outside world?

## PEREL

Well, look, any community that's closed has this idea about respectability. The Jewish community is often a closed community, and in such a community, people's sexual freedom will be affected. You have to go *out* to be free. And when we talk about family environment, what we often hear about is a *split between the marriage object and the sex object*, which is illustrated in the sentence: "Have sex with non-Jewish girls, but marry a Jewish one."

## LILITH

But, obviously, there's no equivalent message to Jewish girls...

## PEREL

Now let me explain: one traditional image is that the Jewish woman has to be clean and pure when the man will be ready to come back... Basically, the issue is how people link marriage with passion. Among Jews, marriage was always thought to be paramount, it is thought about in terms of family, children, being parents. "You are not complete until you are married." And for many Jewish youth, the idea of Jewishness is so closely linked with family that marrying a Jew, in the context of creating a Jewish family, is okay, but dating Jews has little appeal. When they think of dating, sexuality,

sensuality, intimacy, women and men—and not just Jewish parents, achievement and children or family values—then looking at the Jewish family does not give them many examples they would want to replicate. Yes, there is a kind of image of the Jewish family that is security, that is continuity, that is stability, that is tradition, but that does not necessarily include other aspects such as sexuality, discovering the other, exploring the differences and similarities, and experiencing one's independence and individuality.

## LILITH

Do you think that the issue of continuity and Jewish survival is much more focused for the Jewish people so that when they think of settling down and having a family there's an aspect of: "Well, I'll put aside what I would perhaps be more attracted to—or just as attracted to—for the sake of my people?"

*Often*  
the Jewish family  
is described as  
a desexualized  
environment."

## PEREL

A difference that certainly exists is that if one thinks of creating a Jewish family, one thinks of belonging and being able to feel part of a certain people and being able to be part of the continuity of that people. The Italian who creates an Italian family may think that continuing a certain tradition and a certain value and belief sys-

tem in the family is important, but there is no survival of a *people* at stake that one would break—in terms of breaking a legacy—if one did not recreate this kind of family.

I think, though, that that creates a problem when you put the entire focus on needing to marry Jewish because of the continuity and because of the tribal element that's involved and which needs to be perpetuated. Because then, you create a split, because you say that the marriage is primarily there to fulfill that purpose. Here again we see the split between marriage and sex object. It is then that dating starts to take place on the "outside."

#### LILITH

Are Jewish family patterns at odds with those of the majority culture in the U.S.?

#### PEREL

In a Jewish family, a major idea is the idea of interdependence, that what one does has implications for others. I would compare it to the WASPs, where the core of the stance of being is an "I," geared toward autonomy, self-respect and self-individuation.

We keep saying that the Jewish family is a close family. A close family has mechanisms to make the family become close, like manipulation, like guilt, like control.

#### LILITH

Are there no positive ways of keeping the family close?

#### PEREL

Yes: caring and nurturing and family gatherings, religion and tradition, holidays and celebrations. But then we start to think of the negative sides, of the fact that the issue of separation and developing one's sense of individuality is more difficult.

I think one can't see the Jewish family as a closed system without then recognizing that a closed system often has overprotection as a mechanism for making this system closed, for making the family united. So when you talk about the caring and how positive it is, that people really care

and that you can come home and that you really can belong in the family, the other side of it is that it is smothering and it feels like there is no free space for autonomy, and that any attempt for individuation and rebellion is seen as a betrayal of loyalty to the family.

A natural process that goes on in a family is that adolescents differentiate from their parents and as they are able to do that successfully, they separate from them to find out who they are and gain a sense of self-worth. And once that is done they can come back. The issue of separation is a more sensitive one in Jewish families. It can be related to the feeling of vulnerability, to fear of loss. Letting a child go becomes losing a person who is very close to one's self.

#### LILITH

Do you think it is a yearning for individuation or for separation from that family closeness that causes Jewish men, particularly at adolescence but even at mid-life, to be so rejecting of Jewish women, of their wives, of their first marriages?

#### PEREL

I think that's an issue for men in general. As for the nuances that make it Jewish, in some cases the emotional process of the family becomes fused with the cultural content, the Jewish piece. Feelings about Jewishness become confused with feelings about family, and that's when you get statements like, "My mother is irrational, my mother is Jewish, therefore if I want to find a woman who is rational, she must not be Jewish." So one needs to differentiate the negative emotional process in the family from the Jewish identity to enable the person to reconnect with his or her Jewishness and with other Jews intimately.

#### LILITH

You talked before about how Jewish family values and American family values were not consonant with each other. What about other American values, such as those relating to physical appearance? Do these influence the stereotypes Jews have of themselves and of each other?



#### PEREL

Members of a minority group that is devalued often internalize the images that the majority culture holds about them. Children, in growing up, identify primarily with their parents and then, as the circle broadens, with others. If these objects of identification are devalued by the majority society, the minority child is confronted with having to internalize stereotypes, prejudices, and exclusions which are attributed to the group and which become part of their self-image.

Our idea of what is beautiful—for example, being blond—have been set as a standard by the majority culture. If we don't fit that standard, then we are often left with a feeling that we are not as good. We can do all kinds of things to be more accepted, but the whole idea of doing things to be more accepted by the majority culture is that it presupposes that there is something in us which we think is less good, and so that starts to attack self-esteem. That's when self-esteem and ethnic identity come together, because the issues of self-esteem are often attributed to being part of that group: "I am not pretty because I am Jewish"; "I am not desirable because I am Jewish"; "I am excluded because I am Jewish"; "if I weren't Jewish, maybe these things would not happen to me." I think what happens with oppressed minorities is that there is an acting-out of the internalized oppression between the men and women inside

the group, where they each become the oppressors of each other.

#### LILITH

How do Jewish women and Jewish men oppress each other?

#### PEREL

They each project the negative stereotypes onto the other so that they then don't have to see it in themselves. The principle is a very simple one. If we see someone who reminds us too much of things in ourselves which we don't like, one of the ways to avoid dealing with the fact that we have it in ourselves is to see it in the other person, and then to reject that other person.

#### LILITH

You talked of negative stereotypes from the outside being internalized, but what about *positive* stereotypes—the Jewish woman seen by the outside as dark and mysterious and attractive and all of that—certainly not asexual?

#### PEREL

You constantly ask yourself when you see the intermarriage situation: how come the same things which are causes for distancing and rejection inside a group become causes for attraction outside the group? My analysis is that the stereotypes that work inside the group don't work cross-culturally: a Jewish man may not like a Jewish woman who has certain traits, but if he sees them in another woman, he will like them. The same Jewish woman who is seen as overbearing, overprotective, intrusive, castrating, and so forth, is seen by an outsider as often being very warm and very caring and very interesting and very involved, and therefore very desirable and very attractive.

#### LILITH

Why should Jewish men appreciate the assertiveness of non-Jewish women and just hate it in Jewish women?

#### PEREL

*It doesn't have the same emotional impact, that's all I can say....* Stereotypes persist strongly inside the group

because people know the stereotypes much more, so if a man sees a woman as having one part of the stereotype, he can very quickly attribute all the rest to her, in ways that somebody who knows her less may not do. So that if I am a Jewish man and I see you as very materialistic, I may immediately say that you're a *JAP* and if I say you're a *JAP*, I include in that 15 other attributes of a *JAP* which may have nothing to do with you.

#### LILITH

In a recent group, a Jewish man of about 40 said that he'd gone out with a Jewish woman who had complimented him on his shiny car, saying, "What a nice car." When she got into the car and looked at the odometer, she said, "Oh, I guess it's not that new."

*"When Jewish women describe themselves or other women, their descriptions are lacking in sexual attributes."*

He felt, he said, absolute revulsion and was embarrassed by the force of his own reactions adding, "I am sort of ashamed to tell the story; I thought what a total *JAP* she was; all she cared about was how new the car was." He conceded that had this been a non-Jewish woman, he would have thought her remarks quite benign, that she

was making comments about the car just to make conversation. But because she was Jewish, he immediately judged her to be materialistic.

#### PEREL

Stereotyping is a way to avoid dealing with the individual, because you attribute group traits to the individual and so you don't have to really get to know the person. One of the main functions of stereotyping is that it maintains distance between people.

#### LILITH

How can you deal with a stereotype when it's thrown at you?

#### PEREL

One of the things to do with stereotypes is to refute them when others put them on you. "You tell me I am a certain way; I tell you it's not true."

#### LILITH

Let's take this scenario. He says, "Let's go on a picnic this weekend in the country." She says, "Great, I'll pack a picnic lunch." He screams at her, "My God, you're just like my Jewish mother, you're always thinking about what we're going to eat." What does she say?

#### PEREL

I believe in these situations the best thing is to bring in humor to detoxify some of that stuff. I'd say, "You must like her very much."

#### LILITH

Allegedly, American men and American culture have changed a little bit, at least in the last 10 or 15 years. So the qualities in Jewish men—that they are allegedly more sensitive, more expressive of their feelings than other men, are more involved in raising the children, less macho, less aggressive—should be on the ascendency.

#### PEREL

The '60s brought values of softness and emotionality for men. These became positive qualities, which many Jewish men had, but which in the past had been seen as meek, passive, weak, and so forth, and now were defined by the dominant culture as being positive

and desirable and making attraction stronger. And for the woman, suddenly it became good to be powerful and to be ambitious and to be a go-getter and so forth, which the Jewish women had in them, and which then could become a source of positiveness about who they are.... I think we probably are in a middle phase, a transitional period. Stereotypes persist far beyond, far after the reality.



## LILITH

Do many Jewish women you talk to feel they are not getting what they want from Jewish men?

## PEREL

You want someone who will validate you and recognize you for who you are. There is a very strong longing on the part of the women to be recognized by the men of their own group. But what happens when you feel you can only be valued as a person and validated for who you are with someone who does *not* know you and who won't attribute all these traits and stereotypes to you?

There is the feeling that men from outside the group have a much stronger impact; they recognize Jewish women for being beautiful, attractive, sensitive, for being assertive. The same assertiveness that Jewish men dislike in Jewish women becomes a nice quality rather than a negative quality when it becomes recognized by a member of another group. If a non-Jew will see her assertiveness as being something very nice, then she is able to transform the negative connotation of assertiveness into a positive one. If she has negative feelings about herself as a sexual being, by going outside her group she can become valued if the member of the other group sees her positively. So looking outside the group allows one to escape negativity.

Another aspect is when you hear someone saying, "When I go out with a man I never tell him I'm Jewish. I don't want him to stereotype me. I want to be seen for who I am." As if "who I am" stands separate from the fact that "I

am Jewish"—which is *part* of who I am. It's as if one's individuality is in conflict with one's ethnic identity.

## LILITH

Isn't this a form of self-hatred?

## PEREL

Yes. In self-hatred, one attributes the negative parts of oneself to being Jewish, and therefore the only way to free yourself is to dissociate yourself from one's ethnicity by cutting off the Jewish part. Self-hatred is an extreme form of dealing with ambivalence, with the positive and negative thoughts and feelings about one's ethnic identity; another is a feeling of superiority.

I think every generation has its outlet for how you can compensate for or restore the parts of yourself or the parts of your past or your culture or family that you dislike. If it had been in the '50s, people may have gone and studied existentialism, or in the '60s studied Eastern religions.... In the '70s and '80s, many Jewish men and women may deal with ambivalence by rejecting each other.

A lot of this relates to the lack of perceived and acknowledged diversity in the Jewish community and the need to find it on the outside.

## LILITH

In terms of the individual psychodynamics, will it be easier for Jewish women and Jewish men to approach each other if we have a broader permissible range of what it means to be Jewish—to be Jewish *and* female, Jewish *and* male?

## PEREL

If the group recognizes more diversity within it, it allows each person more individuality. With more diversity, if I become *part* of the group, I don't necessarily become *like* everyone who is in the group. I can be part of it and still remain myself.

We need to have available many more mental images of "the Jew." If we feel comfortable enough, we don't have to produce in our children the boy who is the parents' *nachas* [satisfaction from achievement] machine or the girl who is the dolled-up creature—comfortable enough to allow the diversity that exists anyway to flourish.

I think that we have much to gain by being able to accept diversity. I think diversity is related to maturity. The more we are able to live with people who are different within our own group and the more we're able to recognize them in ways that are not condescending and defensive all the time, the richer we will be.

The other thing is that we have to bring a new *content* in what the Jewish piece is, which I find missing a lot of the time. The *content* of what it means for oneself to be a Jew has become empty and minimal, in my opinion.

People are not going to just gain a sense of pride in the here-and-now based on new images you're going to provide to them; they're going to gain a new sense of pride, or struggle with how they want to maintain their sense of Jewish identity by finding personal meanings to their Jewishness. I don't think it has to be Jewish religious content only—it may be historical, it may be Zionist, it may be cultural or literary—but there needs to be relevant content.

People need *content* to match their images; if not, images become hollow. With the stereotypes, you have a host of negative images that are being talked about by Jewish women and men and the reason people don't defend against them—and a reason people don't know how to go beyond them—is because they have not much Jewish content with which to shape alternatives. □

Mother  
Nature  
and  
Human  
Nature:  
The  
Poetry  
of  
Malka  
Heifetz  
Tussman

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An Appreciation by  
Marcia Falk

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**M**alka Heifetz Tussman claims a special place in the world of Yiddish literature. Her poetry—frank and exploring in subject matter, innovative in language—crossed previously established boundaries of convention; critics called her the most modern poet in Yiddish.

Born on a farm in the Ukraine, Malka Heifetz was raised in a Yiddish-speaking home where Hebrew texts and culture were ever-present. The daughter of a mystic who studied Kabbalah, Malka was, from a young age, keenly sensitive to the life of the spirit. No less keen was her appreciation of the natural world, whose voices and rhythms provided her with her first poetic models. Later she would find models and inspiration in the poems of Pushkin, Lermontov, Akhmatova, Whitman, Poe, Rimbaud, Tagore, Bialik, and her Yiddish contemporaries.

In the early stages of her career as a poet, Malka Heifetz Tussman (then—as throughout her career—she was adamant about keeping the “Heifetz” in her name) taught herself to write in strict verse forms. Later, she experimented with both structure and style, exploiting the flexibility of the Yiddish language to create a unique voice, rich with verbal and syntactic invention.

The one traditional form she never abandoned was the triolet—a tricky, eight-line poem containing multiple repetitions and rhymes—which she molded to express a wide variety of themes.

Over the years, Malka Heifetz Tussman published consistently in the Yiddish journals, while also raising a family—she had two sons, Yossele and Yudele—and teaching Yiddish to children and adults. Between 1949 and 1977, she produced six books of poems and in 1981, she was awarded the prestigious Manger Prize for Yiddish Literature. In the last decade of her life she continued to write prolifically, and was finally deterred only by failing eyesight and what she called her “sick hands.” Tussman died March 30, 1987 in her

Berkeley home; she was 91.

This, of course, is only the barest outline of Malka Heifetz Tussman’s life as a poet. To it, I would like to add a personal remembrance.

I met Malka for the first time in the spring of 1973, when we shared the platform of a poetry reading at a Jewish arts festival in Berkeley, California. Malka had moved to Berkeley the previous year, after spending a year in Israel following the death of her husband; most of her adult life prior to that had been spent in Los Angeles. I was living at this time in Palo Alto, where I was finishing up a doctorate at Stanford.

I was struck immediately by Malka’s demeanor, the intensity of her expressions, the dignified—one might even say proud—way that she carried herself. But what drew me to her most was an odd coincidence: at this poetry reading, each of us had read a poem entitled “To a Modern Kabbalist,” though hers was in Yiddish, mine in English. More than similar in title, the two poems expressed the same point of view, and this startled both of us. Although Malka’s poem had been written years before mine, I had not read or heard it, or any of her poetry, until that day. Added to this was the less odd but, for me, significant coincidence of our having the same first name—my Hebrew name is Malka. I considered our meeting to have been *bashert*, fated, and I went home that night, a new book in hand, and began to devour Malka’s poems.

It was not long before I found myself in the grips of a maddening, wonderful, frustrating process, trying to make these poems come alive in English. When the summer came, I decided to abandon my plans to study Yiddish literature at the YIVO in New York, in favor of spending my days with Malka and becoming intimate with her poetry, in order to translate it faithfully. I rented a room in a communal house in Berkeley, a few miles from Malka’s apartment, and settled in for a summer’s work.

Malka and I met together for almost three months—six days a week, ten, sometimes twelve, hours a

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## I AM WOMAN

*I am the exalted Rachel  
whose love lit the way for Rabbi Akiba.*

*I am the small, bashful village girl  
who grew up among the tall poplars  
and blushed at the “good morning”  
of her brother’s tutor.*

*I am the pious girl  
who paled as her mother raised her  
hands to her eyes  
for the blessing over the Sabbath  
candles.*

*I am the obedient bride  
who humbly bent her head beneath  
the shears  
the night before the wedding.*

*I am the rabbi’s daughter  
who offered her chaste body to save  
a Jewish town  
and afterwards set fire to herself.*

*I am the woman of valor  
who bore and fed children  
to earn herself a little place in paradise.*

*I am the mother  
who, in great hardship,  
raised sons to be righteous men.*

*I am the Hasid’s daughter,  
infused with her father’s fervor,  
who went out defiant, with her hair  
cropped,  
to educate the people.*

*I am the barrier-breaker  
who distributed Bread and Freedom  
and freed love from the wedding  
canopy.*

*I am the pampered girl  
who set herself behind a plow  
to force the gray desert into green life.*

*I am the one whose fingers  
tightened around the hoe,  
on guard for the steps of the enemy.*

*I am the one who stubbornly  
carries around a strange alphabet  
to implant in children’s ears.*

*I am all these and many more.*

*And everywhere, always, I am woman.*

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day. I would arrive at her doorstep in the morning and make coffee for myself, hot water with lemon for Malka. Then we'd begin the day's business: reading, discussing, joking, arguing. When we felt like it, we would stop to eat—simple, delicious meals that we took no less pleasure in preparing than in eating. We had a standing joke about confusing *kutletn* (cutlets) with *kupletn* (couplets), which, we maintained, were equally important to our lives.

Over the course of our many shared meals, I heard the stories of her life told and re-told with wit and poignancy and humor. One of eight children, from the start Malka had distinguished herself by her fiercely independent nature. She immigrated to America before most of her family came. In Chicago, where her family settled, she became part of the Cafe Royale circle of poets, and—she was quick to add—she eventually came to know all the important members of Yiddish literary society, even though she never lived in the center of Yiddish cultural activity, New York.

Although Malka often alluded to her many male admirers and suitors in her stories about the Yiddish literary world, the female personalities came across as livelier and more impressive than their male counterparts. Each of the Yiddish women poets sounded, in the anecdotes Malka would tell, more flamboyant than the next; each had fought in her own way for recognition by the male-dominated critical circles. Although Malka resented being labeled a “woman poet”—like many women of her generation, she was sensitive to the insult traditionally implied by the qualifier *vaibisher*, womanly, and she preferred to think that poetry knew no gender—it was clear that she identified with this group of gifted women who were unafraid to tell their truths in their work. And it was equally clear that she had pursued her own career and life with a willful autonomy—a proud, proto-feminist iconoclasm. Throughout, she never lost her passion for eros and her intense sensuality; and she scorned the belief that age diminished these capacities. She enjoyed providing living demonstration that it did not.

While working together on her poems, Malka and I often disagreed, and sometimes vehemently fought about how a Yiddish phrase or line

should be rendered in English—each one basing her claim to being right on the particular linguistic expertise that she possessed and the other lacked. Still, we both enjoyed—even loved—our collaborative process. Both of us opinionated and passionate, we nevertheless ended up changing our minds—and each other's—often. Sometimes, in response to my questioning a word or a line in one of her poems, Malka would decide to adjust the finished and already-published original. Equally often, I would revise one of my own poems after hearing Malka's comments about it.

At the end of the summer of 1973, I left California and Malka for Israel, to study on a Fulbright Grant before beginning my career as an assistant professor in upstate New York. I had completed a manuscript of eighty translations of Malka's poems, a small portion of which was subsequently published by Tree Books in 1977 as a limited-edition chapbook entitled *Am I Also You?* (now out-of-print).

Working on poetry with Malka had been an unpredictably stimulating, rich experience. She was eager to share the tricks of her trade, and had even nagged me until I had finally produced a (very silly) triolet of my own. Once, I asked her to teach me the secret of writing a crown of sonnets—that impossible-seeming sequence in which the last line of one poem becomes the first line of the next, until fourteen poems have been written, and then a fifteenth is composed out of the opening lines of the first fourteen. Malka eyed me as though I were an idiot. “It's easy,” she said, “you write the last one first.”

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**Marcia Falk** teaches literature and creative writing at the University of Judaism in Los Angeles. She is the author of a translation of the biblical Song of Songs; a chapbook of poems, *This Year in Jerusalem* (State Street Press, 1986); and a volume of translations from the Hebrew, *The Spectacular Difference: Selected Poems of Zelda* (forthcoming from the Jewish Publication Society). She is currently writing *The Book of Blessings*, a feminist Jewish reconstruction of prayer (forthcoming from Harper & Row). Her newly-revised manuscript of translations, *Selected Poems of Malka Heifetz Tussman*, is in search of a publisher.

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This is an edited version of a letter by Malka Heifetz Tussman to Marcia Falk. It first appeared in 1977 in *Am I Also You*, a chapbook published by Tree Books.

Berkeley, California  
March 4, 1975

My dear Marcia,

*After you have read all my books and translated so many of my poems, you still want to know more about me. And I thought that my poetry is me! You want to know when I began writing, who influenced my poetry, why I write the way I do. This may not be what you want, but I will tell you what I know.*

*From the very beginning of my existence I had more problems than anyone I know. The second of eight children—the next youngest was prettier, more clever, and sickly. Everyone loved her and pampered her. I was left to grow like a wild weed. I started to believe that I did not even belong to this family. I thought they found me somewhere and let me eat at their table.*

*I didn't want to talk or act like the rest of them. I wanted to be a bird—so I swooped and jumped instead of walking. I spoke the language of the one that made its nest above our roof. I would hide in the tall stalks of wheat and listen as they made words . . . My mother would talk to me and I would answer in my own tongue. And I would quietly giggle, “They're so dumb. They don't understand real words.”*

*We had private tutors who lived in our house on the farm during the school semesters. They were to instruct us in Hebrew, Yiddish, and Russian. I was the most troublesome of the pupils, never on time for the lessons. Someone had to be sent out to find me in the fields or meadows or barns. Still, I learned to read and write Yiddish and Russian quite early. Soon I began scribbling things on walls, tablecloths, and scraps of paper. . . . Mother found [my first poem] and showed it to father. My father smiled and said, “Leave her*



Elaine Starkman

alone. These are her own words. We don't understand." (My father was also looking for hidden words in Kabbalah.) I ran out of the house, happy: maybe he really is my father. I headed for the orchard. I did not go through the open gate but climbed over the high fence, tore my dress, and rolled like a wild colt under the apple tree . . . My nickname was Senno, meaning stack of hay in Russian, because of my wild, unruly hair. Some people said, "If she'd comb her hair, she might even be pretty. . . ."

School in the neighboring town. I may not have been pretty, but I could make rhymes about everyone. Teachers reprimanded and students bribed me not to make rhymes about them. . . .

Reading books. Lots of books. Certain books I'm not allowed to read yet. "Too young." Tolstoy—yes, but Dostoevsky—no. I get hold of Dostoevsky anyway. I wonder: How does this man (only a man), how does he know so much about people? If you know so much about people, you have to tell all you know about people, so people will know people and know

how to live with people. Are all good people also bad people? How many people can one little people hold? Am I a lot of people? Could I do harm to people other than I-people?

America: A new country, a new language. I am going to forget for a while about Me. I am going to learn fast about America, about English. I am going to love it all. It will never be "you," "I." I will make it just "we." A great, big land of "we." "All are equal in America." Strange—America and God. It says so on the dollar. Someone says, "Have you got a dollar?" Oh well, this is one of the good people that is bad people. I must be careful not to talk too much. . . .

Edgar Allan Poe. I love the rhythm of his poems. I walk by his rhythm, I chew my food by his rhythm. I learn English. I read all I can lay my hands on. I hear them say that I have a good head on my shoulders. I am pleased and smile to myself. I am just a little prettier now.

Three evenings a week I see my good tutor K.M. He is pleased with me—I read it in his eyes. He likes the short verses I write for him. He says, "My child, you are a poet. You will write. You must now learn all forms of poetry. Not that you must write in any one form, but you must know about all of them." I love dear K.M. He is old and precious. I do as he asks me. I make progress and make him glad.

A young man gives me a gift—Leaves of Grass by Walt Whitman. I read, I discover a new America, a new poetry.

K.M. takes me to a group called "Poets in the Making." I am among young poets. K.M. introduces me as "Poet Malka" and they receive me warmly. I feel good. I mention Walt Whitman. The leader of the group smiles and says, "Whitman is a no-poet Poet." I am hurt and frightened. I look to K.M. for help. He consoles me, "This man doesn't know what he's talking about."

I show K.M. a poem I wrote for Whitman. It is something about the soul that is the body. Body is soul and soul is body. Something about love. Love is all soul. Love hurts soul-

fully, and the whole body hurts. It is my first poem in free verse. K.M. searches my eyes and asks softly, "Are you in love, my child?"

A few weeks later, K.M. takes me to a concert. After the concert to the Cafe Royale in Chicago. He orders coffee and cake. I show him more poems—some triolets, some free verse. K.M. says, as he puts his hand over mine, "So many poets in America! So many write English. Some good, some not, but we have so few writing Yiddish. Stay with us. Write Yiddish poetry. Write your own way, even if it is hard to get into print. Even if it is not to the liking of some established literati."

I write poetry in Yiddish. Read a great deal. Prophets, Psalms, Song of Songs, Job, Ecclesiastes. I read the old and the new. Arthur Rimbaud is now my "Beautiful Boy." Whitman and Rimbaud open me up to Myself, give me freedom of movement within the rhythm of my own being, my own breathing.

I am loved . . .

I am a wife . . .

I am a mother . . .

I am a teacher . . .

I want to scream . . .

I want to run . . .

I want to cry . . .

and I do what I have to do, and in the meantime poems break through. . . .

K.M. becomes very sick. He lives to see my first book published:

Lieder, 1949.

In 1958—my second book,

Mild My Wild

1965—Shadows of Remembering

1972—Leaves Don't Fall

1974—Under Your Sign

And so my poetry is still traveling the endless road of "the Self" to reach "the You." It knows no other road . . .

Over the years, Schloime my husband often would say, "You ought to be happy, why are you sad?" My answer: "Don't you know? When I am happy, I am sad."

Love,  
Malka

(Continued from Page 5)

women into the system has not been achieved." While 10 years ago, women sought access to the boards of Federation agencies, today they are seeking access to the Board of Trustees and Executive Committee of the Federation itself. "This has now become the new citadel to be stormed for that small group of women who have already reached the highest levels of power and decision making within individual agencies," she said.

Moreover, Monson noted, "the growth of numbers of women in executive or professional positions has not kept pace with that of lay leaders." Just two Federation agencies out of 19 have female executive directors today, both of them agencies dealing with family and child care.

There was, the report showed, a greater diversity in the types of committees women currently chaired as volunteers—urban affairs and community relations in addition to the more traditional ones such as catering and education.

## How do these findings for the Philadelphia area relate to the national picture?

A recent study on "The Place of Women in the Leadership of Federations," by Barry A. Kosmin and Jeffrey Sheckner, published by the Council of Jewish Federations in November 1986, surveyed the same basic period (1975-1985).

The study showed that "the most dramatic changes in the period since 1975 have been the growth of

women presidents and treasurers. There are now three times as many women presidents as 1975 so that today one in five of Federation presidents are women. The growth in the number of women treasurers is even more dramatic.

Nevertheless, "The Board position with the highest percent of women is that of secretary (54.4%), where a majority are now women. Overall the proportion of women in the governance of Federations, the combined total of officers and Board members, has increased by 66% from 17.3% of all Board members in 1975 to 28.8% in 1986."

The study breaks the data down into specific committees and various city sizes and reports respondents' comments on community attitudes toward women's participation and on married couples' participation in Federation governance structures, but it does not discuss the current situation of women in Federation executive and professional positions.

Rabbi Joy Levitt, of Roslyn, New York, elected by acclamation as the seventh president of the Reconstructionist Rabbinical Association, became the first woman to be elected president of a national rabbinical organization.

In the same election, Rabbi Sandy Eisenberg Sasso, the first woman ordained by the Reconstructionist Rabbinical College, in 1974, became First Vice-President of the Association. She and her husband, Rabbi Dennis C. Sasso, spir-

## WOMEN WHO RESCUED JEWS

### 93-Year-Old Woman Receives Medal For Helping Jews in World War II

A 93-year-old great-great-grandmother, **Wilhelmine Asbeek Brusse**, who sheltered many Dutch Jews in her home during World War II, received a Yad Vashem Medal of the Righteous, with four generations of her descendants attending the ceremony at the Israel Consulate in New York.

Asbeek's underground activities started as early as the beginning of the war in Holland, when she took Jewish refugees into her home. She hid not only people but their possessions. After the war, she returned to Jewish friends the valuables she had hidden for them in her attic.

Asbeek, whose code name was "Tante Cos" or "Oma," was arrested for her activities. After escaping from Westerbork Concentration Camp on September 3,

1944, she continued to shelter Jews until liberation in May 1945.

One of Asbeek's two daughters, Marian Leisen, had married a Jewish doctor before the war. In an act of defiance against the Nazis, Marian and her sister Wilhelmine (later Esther) converted to Judaism in 1941.

After the war, Asbeek's daughter Esther married Manfred Klafter, one of the Jews her mother had hidden. The couple's adopted son, an orphaned concentration camp survivor, made *aliyah* in 1967. The Klafters followed him and moved to Israel, where Esther died six years ago.

Asbeek now lives in Scotch Plains, New Jersey, as do her daughter Marian, her granddaughter Daisy Wexler, and some of her five great-grandchildren and six great-great-grandchildren. As all of the generations watched, Asbeek, the only non-Jewish member of the large family, accepted her Yad Vashem medal.

JTA

## MAZEL TOV

### Three Sisters Pay Tribute To the Gentiles Who Saved Them

Three Jewish sisters, **Miriam Oginski, Sarah Weiner, and Zahava Burack**, paid tribute to a Polish couple, **Jozef and Stephania Macugowski**, who hid them and their parents under the floorboards of their house for two and a half years at great risk to themselves.

The risk became especially severe when Germans made the house their headquarters, but Macugowski continued to sneak food and water to the family crouched in terror under

Three Jewish sisters, **Miriam Oginski, Sarah Weiner, and Zahava Burack**, paid tribute to a Polish couple, **Jozef and Stephania Macugowski**, who hid them and their parents under the floorboards of their house for two and a half years at great risk to themselves. The risk became especially severe when Germans made the house their headquarters, but Macugowski continued to sneak food and water to the family crouched in terror under

the floorboards beneath their feet.

Brought to New York 40 years later to receive Yad Vashem's "Righteous Among the Nations" designation, the couple, who speak no English, indicated through interpreters that they saved the Jews simply because "it was the right thing to do."

### **Polish Woman Was a "Righteous Gentile" at Age Ten**

Telling a similar story is Righteous Gentile **Julia Lubois Tuargzik**, who still lives in the same town of Budzisz, Poland, where her parents hid nine Jews for 26 months behind a false wooden wall in a space that measured four by six feet. Brought to the United States for a three-month visit by **Bernice Lerman Feit** and her brother, **Solomon Leon Lerman**, members of the saved Jewish family, Tuargzik recounted her story to the Center for Holocaust Studies in Brooklyn.

Tuargzik, who was only 10 years old at the time, was the eldest and the only one of the three children of **Franciszek and Moria Lubois** to be told about he hidden Jews. Sworn to secrecy, she helped to bring food to them. "Franciszek Lubois was more than special—he was a saint," says Bernice Lerman. "He and his wife knew the Germans would make good their threat to torture and kill any Poles harboring runaway Jews."

But Julia remembers clearly understanding her father's simple rationale. "He felt," she explained in Polish, "that everyone had a right to live."

## **Women's Resource Center Library Is Dedicated**

In March 1987, the new Jewish Women's Resource Center Library, on the premises of the National Council of Jewish Women, New York Section, was dedicated.

The Library consists of more than 3,000 items by or about Jewish women, including books, magazines, and newspapers, dissertations and speeches, notes and ephemera from the early Jewish feminist movement, and texts of new rituals.

The collection also includes information on little-known aspects of Jewish women's lives revealed in documents on

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### **Survivor Pursues Nazi**

**Violetta Friedman**, a grimly determined Auschwitz survivor who now lives in Madrid, is struggling for justice against a notorious and openly avowed Nazi, **Leon Degrelle**, who was condemned to death in Belgium after World War II for his war crimes but managed to escape to Spain.

In a television appearance and in an interview published in July 1985, Degrelle boasted about his Nazi past and denied the existence of the gas chambers. Friedman initiated legal proceedings to have Degrelle cease spreading lies in the media. The judge of the Civil Court of Madrid dismissed the case, and Friedman is continuing her appeal.

Jewish prostitution and battered women and children of today.

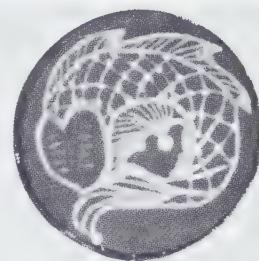
This unique collection is open to the public. Material does not circulate, but scholars and readers are welcome to work on the premises.

"We started with boxes that we stored under our sofa," said **Nina Cardin**, a rabbinical student and one of the founders of the Jewish Women's Resource Center. She, **Rabbi Carol Glass**, and **Rabbi Julie Gordon** created the dedication ceremony for the library.

Other speakers included *Lilith* editor **Aviva Cantor**, lecturer and author **Blu Greenberg**, and Associate Professor of Talmud at the Jewish Theological Seminary **Judith Hauptman**.

The dedication ritual included musical accompaniment by violinist **Rivka**

Mezuzah by Ita Aber



**Fingerhut** and, climaxing the evening, the affixing of a round, embroidered mezuzah to the library doorway. The shape of the mezuzah indicated that the design of this ritual object needn't be phallic, and the embroidery proudly displayed an age-old women's craft. As the mezuzah was affixed, women joined hands all along the adjacent staircase, symbolizing their symbolic participation in the dedication. They also signed their names to a long ribbon attached to the mezuzah.

## **OBITUARIES**

**Beverly Minkoff**, past president of Women's American ORT, died Feb. 14, 1987, after a long illness, at age 60. Minkoff served as national president of the 145,000-member Jewish women's organization from 1979 through 1983.

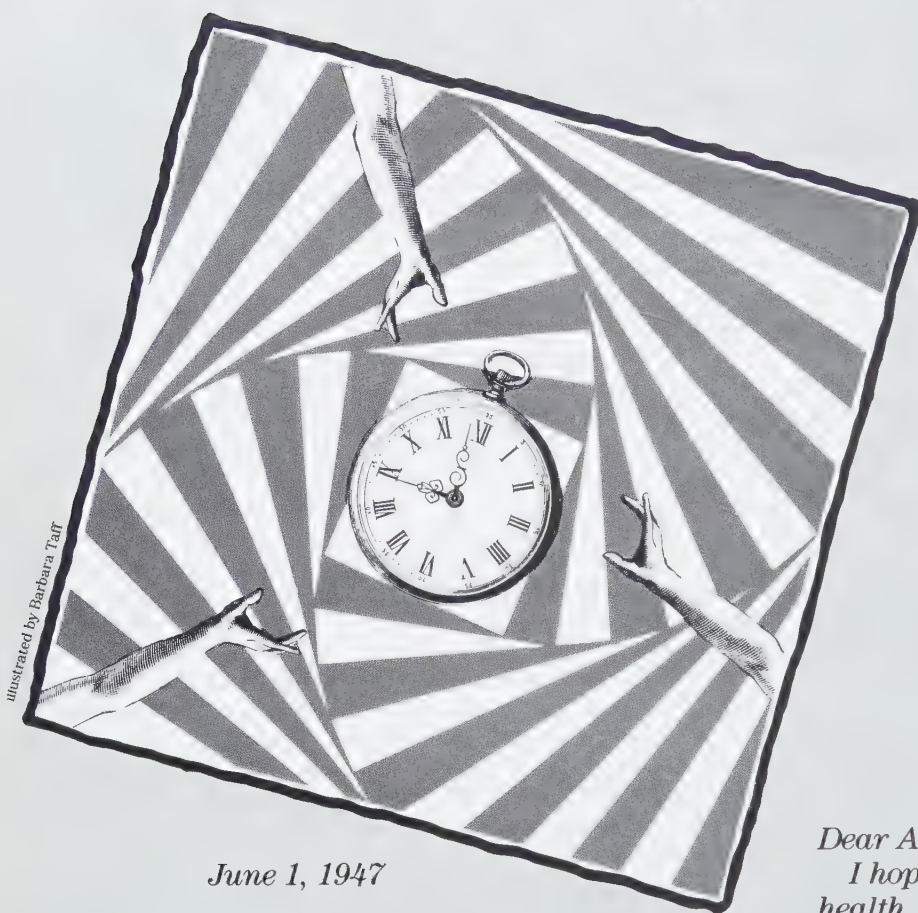
She joined ORT in the early 1950s, when the organization was rapidly expanding operations to meet the needs of the recently established state of Israel and of the Jewish communities in Algeria, Morocco, Tunisia, and Iran. By 1965, Minkoff was president of the Long Island region. In 1967 she became a member of the national executive committee and served in a variety of posts until she was elected national president.

**Congresswoman Sala Galant Burton**, democratic representative from San Francisco, died on Feb. 1, 1987, of complications from colon cancer. She was 61.

Burton, known affectionately as the "bubbe" of Congress, was serving her second term in the House at the time of her death, having been elected in her own right after finishing her late husband's term.

Burton was born in **Bialystok**, Poland, and came to the United States shortly before World War II.

She was a staunch supporter of Israel and of Soviet Jewry, as well as of human rights in general. She and her husband visited the Soviet Union in 1977, where they met **Shcharansky** and other refuseniks.



June 1, 1947

Dear Clara:

This evening they let us go to a film. I'm not sure what it was because only ten minutes into it, a bell rang and the orderlies came in and took us back to our rooms. Excuse me, our cells. That was O.K. with me. I wasn't in the mood for popular entertainment. Anyway, there was no music to accompany the black and white flickering. So I would have been bored.

No letter from anyone. People forget so quickly. My memory is long. As much as I try to block out the past, especially the recent past, it just keeps gnawing away at me, like the eagle at Prometheus's liver. But I'm not as strong as he was. I'm just a frail, second rate writer. Maybe third rate. Didn't you once say I was third rate? I forgave you. Probably I deserved it. Just write me. I'm terribly lonely.

Love,  
Ada

## What Remains is Random

by Norma Fain Pratt

June 10, 1947

Dear Ada,

I hope this letter finds you in good health. You are wrong. No one has forgotten you. In fact, the other day I ran into Starkman at the Second Avenue Hungarian Restaurant. He was on his way back from the theatre. We got to talking about the play he had just seen and he was just about to write the review. He said he wished Ada had written the dialogue because she's so good at it, so fluid, and realistic. He's not the only one who thinks like that. I wish you had more confidence in yourself. Mama used to say about both of us that we were our own worst enemies.

I'm planning to come to Livingston Manor to see you next Friday afternoon. Joseph promised to drive me although, you know, he's not always exactly reliable. But for you, the beautiful One, he says he'll be on time. I hope I'm right. Visiting hours are from two to six. Please keep a stiff upper lip.

Your best sister,  
Clara

These were the only two letters I found in Ada Fletcher's portfolio at the New York Public Library Archives (Jewish Section) on that unseasonably humid June afternoon in 1973. I had just started research for my article on "Forgotten Yiddish Women Writers Of The Early Twentieth Century" to be published in an up-and-coming little feminist review. I was in the first flush of my new women's movement sensibility and had decided that my contribution would be to rescue at least one unappreciated woman writer from the oblivion into which I believed she had been tossed through the mean efforts of patriarchal indifference. Since I had learned the Yiddish language as a child, I thought I'd go back to my roots and unearth a worthy woman who had written in my mother tongue.

Ada Fletcher's brief biography in the *Lexicon For Modern Yiddish Literature* fascinated me. She was born in a small Bessarabian town in 1894 and had come as a teenager to New York City. Around 1915, she began publishing poems and short stories in Yiddish magazines and newspapers; they received rave reviews for their insight into human character and their erotic qualities. Then she ventured to write in English. It was a novel entitled *Obsession* and the cover advertised the book as "the work of a talented and exotic immigrant girl who after only a few years is writing in the language of her adopted country." All this before she was twenty-five. But after the novel received a set of scathingly bad reviews, she disappeared, as the *Lexicon* noted, "mysteriously."

"Most intriguing," I thought. Who is she and what happened to her and her talent?

I began my search with the primary sources I had at hand—the two letters. But they provided me only with small bits of information: the late forties (now almost thirty years ago); a sister; some kind of institution called Livingston Manor, and two men, Joseph and Starkman. I was easily discouraged. These were sparse clues. But I persevered. So for an hour I read and re-read the letters as they lay on the cool glass-covered desk which reflected a mahogany quietness.

Putting them back into their envelopes, I noticed on the back corner of

Clara's a faded stamp which read: "Archives of the Jewish Radical Literary Society, 25 East 80th Street, N.Y., N.Y." Luckily, I remembered reading about the Society in a recent *Time* magazine article. It seems a group of aged Yiddish literati still ran a reading room in Manhattan and in order to finance their labor of love, Yiddish literature, they opened a restaurant—just for lunch. The cooking team, a husband and wife, were D.P.'s from Eastern Europe who came to the United States in the early nineteen fifties. Their cooking skills and their success deeply moved the *Time* writer.

"Maybe they had other letters by or to Ada Fletcher at this Archive," I speculated. "Or even better, someone who knew her personally might still be around at the place."

I left the Public Library dizzy with

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*It was an accent I would  
recognize anywhere, anytime,  
awake or asleep. . .*

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hope, caught the Madison Avenue bus, and was transported within two short city blocks of the Society's headquarters. It was already four in the afternoon. Long past lunch hour, unfortunately.

Of course, the restaurant was closed. Gingerly, I knocked. No answer. I called: "Anyone there?" in my most journalistic voice.

"Come right in, my dear," someone said and the accent was Yiddish with faint Polish and Russian overtones. It was an accent I would recognize anywhere, anytime, awake or asleep since only my sister and I, born in the United States, lacked the Hebraic-Slavic lilt of all my other relatives.

"Good day," I said in Yiddish, hoping instantly to establish myself as one of the younger generation who had kept faith with her ancestral language. Usually, speaking the *mama-loshn* brought me immediate admiration and good will.

"Ah, come in, young woman," said an elderly man seated at a long table cluttered with books of every size and shape. The greeting was given in an eager voice.

I sat down at the table and explained haltingly why I had come: lost Yiddish women writers, Ada Fletcher, Livingston Manor, the sister Clara, a theatre critic named Starkman. During my entire explanation Agurski (many years later when we had become good friends he told me Agurski was not his real name but one he adopted in order to disguise his Socialist identity during his years in a Stalin labor camp in Tashkent) kept his eyes riveted to my face as if he was trying to figure out what I was *really* thinking. He was fishing for the subtext.

"I've known many women writers," he said, "but I don't know Ada Fletcher. She's before my time. I came to New York in 1954. Starkman, I know. Amos Starkman. He still comes here to the Archives once in a while. Maybe he even gave me some of his letters and papers from the thirties and forties. For hours we talk. Talk about the Yiddish theatre and what it once was. I've always loved the theatre. Anski, Chekhov, Ibsen. But I love the truth more." He laughed. "You'll have to meet him. Do you have time?"

"Yes," I said, not imagining he meant right that minute. To my astonishment, he ran to the phone, and before I could stop him, he had arranged for us both to visit Starkman at seven o'clock at the theatre critic's Riverside Drive apartment. Dinner was included.

"Are you sure this is O.K. on such short notice?" I asked, overwhelmed by the attention and feeling railroaded at the same time.

"Yes, Starkman is starved to talk about the old days. You know how old people are," he grinned mischievously as if this was a private joke between the two of us. "You are lucky," he added, "he's still alive to tell the tale."

"But I'm expected to have dinner with a girlfriend tonight," I said feeling ungrateful because at the mention of possibly having another engagement Agurski lowered his eyes with such seeming dejection that I feared I had somehow betrayed him. "Let me telephone my friend," I said apologetically. "Maybe I can change my plans."

"Here's the phone," he said and he stood waiting for me to dial. No answer. I decided this rare opportunity was more important than dinner with a friend. "O.K., I'll forget about it," I said reassuringly. Agurski smiled.

As a reward he told me a joke while he gathered up a stack of magazines written in German.

"Do you know the difference between a wedding and a funeral?" he asked.

"No," I said, puckering my lips in a mock serious way.

"At a funeral they bury only one person," he giggled slyly.

"I'm not sure I think that's funny," I blurted out honestly. He didn't seem to hear me.

"We have to leave now," he said, "because I need to drop off these magazines on one hundred and tenth street."

"He's lived in this building," Agurski said, "for over fifty years. There are still a lot of Jews left here."

The elevator took us up to the fifth floor. Stepping out, I could see a portly, frizzled grey-haired man waiting at the end of the corridor. He held a cane in one hand and some sort of cooking utensil in the other.

Agurski ran down the hall and embraced Starkman so violently the caned man almost toppled over. The two were involved in a conversation of rapid Polish by the time I reached the door.

"Ah, such a young woman and she is interested in Yiddish literature," he said with enough cynicism and delight to make me regret momentarily that I'd come. "This is going to be awkward and boring," I thought. "Some more bad jokes. He's going to tell me what a good looking woman Ada Fletcher was, how the men were crazy about her, and how she wasted her time dabbling in literary pursuits only to be disappointed and that drove her crazy."

He led us into the large living room. Everything looked new except the paintings on the wall. These portraits of women were painted, I imagined, sometime in the late 1930's by an artist in an Impressionist phase—maybe painted while the person was a student.

"These are Ada Fletcher's best paintings," Starkman said as he observed me moving from one to the other. "Some people thought she was crazy," he added contentiously, "but I had faith in her."

"I knew she was a writer but I didn't know she was a painter," I mumbled, wondering sheepishly whether I had underestimated him.



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*Such a young woman  
and she is interested in  
Yiddish literature," he said  
with cynicism  
and delight. . .*

---

"She painted these when she was especially angry," he explained, shaking his head as if he wanted to shake away some unpleasant memory.

"You must have known her very well. Could you tell me about her life?" I asked, my own voice sounding naive and intrusive.

"Let's have dinner first, child," he said. "After dinner, I'll have the energy to talk about her."

But as soon as we sat down at the dining room table, carefully set, he started to tell us about Ada. Words gushed out of him. I could hardly catch half the things he said. I took out my notebook to jot down the basic information but Starkman shook his head and waved his hand telling me I ought just to eat because he would tell this to me again, more, later, after dinner.

Starkman served each course as if he had been a waiter at some grand hotel in Europe. His eyes sparkled, his frizzy white hair formed a golden halo around his head, and the magic of the moment helped me imagine him as a lithe young worker-intellectual encouraging the starry-eyed twenty-year-old Ada some thirty years ago.

My mesmerizing host's monologue was rapid. I learned Ada had come to the United States alone as an adolescent. There had been a scandal involving her father and a murder he may have committed in some Hungarian *shtetl*. She worked in a shirtwaist factory during the day and at night frequented the East Side literary cafe life. Ada lived with Clara who was

supported by a rich married boyfriend. Their relationship became intolerable when the sister's boyfriend fell in love with Ada. The young Ada swam before my eyes in vivid bits and pieces like one of Picasso's cubistic women.

"She was very beautiful, very beautiful and extraordinarily talented," Starkman said getting up from the table before Agurski or I finished our roast chicken. "It was such a waste, such a pity. They put her in that mental hospital, for nothing, just because she was beautiful and Clara wanted to be rid of her."

We followed him back into the living room. He sat down on the sofa holding his hands over his face and he began to cry, deeply, not even aware that we were watching him. He looked old and brittle.

"I visited her many times in Livingston Manor," he said when he stopped crying. "In those days I kept an exact journal because I thought everything about my life was important and I planned to write my memoirs, or a novel or something. Foolish of me. I can show you what I thought then about her." He walked over to a large steel grey file cabinet tucked neatly away in the corner of the room, disguised by a printed piano shawl.

"It's not here," he said as he quickly leafed through row after row of carefully ordered manila folders. "Maybe I lent it to Zora. She was going to write something about Ada for a Yiddish magazine a few years ago. It could be she never gave it back to me."

"Oh," he suddenly exclaimed. "I've found something about Ada. 'It's a review clipping about her book *Obsession*,'" he chortled reading it over quickly. "She must have really eaten her heart out when she read this one."

He handed me a fragile-looking folded newspaper clipping which broke in half when I touched it. Starkman winced. "We can xerox it," I said reassuringly.

The review was brief but deadly. It was entitled "Pessimism" and it said "Miss Fletcher should go back to night school and learn English." Also, the critic thought the theme of the novel, the seduction of a young Jewish woman by a married Italian vaudeville musician, was both trite and unlikely. "Poor Ada, this must have hurt," I thought. "This might have driven her crazy."

Starkman then turned away from the file cabinet and stared at me. "You see how everything is?" he asked in a puzzled voice. "Random," he answered his own question. "What remains is random. She deserved something better. You are the one to write about her."

"Mr. Starkman," I said in my most modest voice, "I want to write about her but I have to start somewhere, with concrete facts. Could we sit down and really talk?"

He turned toward Agurski and said something in Polish. It seemed to me they both immediately smiled at me in a sad way.

"Do you have a car?" asked Starkman. "Tomorrow I can take you to Livingston Manor, only two hours from the city. You'll learn what you need to know there."

"Mr. Starkman, this is very kind of you," I stuttered, feeling honored yet also feeling unworthy of this man's rich generosity and so much raw emotion. I was a little afraid. Two men I really didn't know. Maybe I better not get into it quite this way, I thought. But I was embarrassed to say no. And Agurski and Starkman might well be the only real link with Ada Fletcher. A trip to Livingston Manor might be a true adventure. I might find her diary or even find Ada herself there, sitting in some attic room, a shriveled old lady, mad but still articulate.

"Is she still alive?" I blurted out like a child.

Starkman and Agurski shook their heads in unison.

"You missed her by just six months," Starkman said. "Clara died in September. Joseph in December and Ada last January 5th. They were all in their eighties. It's amazing how the body can last even when the soul dies."

"What will I learn if I go there?" I asked, suddenly becoming sceptical.

"To see the setting. And you can talk to some of the people who knew her during her thirty years of captivity," Starkman replied kindly.

When I got home I telephoned my friend Evie, hoping she wouldn't be too angry I'd missed our dinner tonight.

"Where were you?" she asked. "I waited at Hunan's for over an hour. Breaking dates with girlfriends isn't nice. I'm going to report you to our local consciousness raising group,"

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*The young Ada swam  
before my eyes  
in vivid bits and pieces  
like one of Picasso's  
cubistic women.*

---

she added churlishly.

I told her about Ada, Starkman, Agurski and my plans for tomorrow. About this great opportunity to rediscover a woman writer from the past.

"Take care of yourself," she said as she signed off.

We left for the Catskills early the next morning in my white Mustang with the little sunroof. Both old men wore nappy caps and plaid jackets. They sat in the back seat, talking and laughing, and acted as if I were a chauffeur. When we stopped for coffee at the Big Red Apple, a rickety but renovated cafeteria originally built in the early nineteen thirties for the then enormous summer traffic to the resorts, Starkman pulled out a map from nowhere, pointed to a place called South Upsburg and said: "Here, here, we must go here first. Camp Gornisht. Ada loved it. We went there together in thirty-five. She read her poetry on Friday night for real intellectuals. They loved her. It's only ten miles from the Big Red Apple."

Under Starkman's direction, we left the highway and took a narrow, steep country road which had deep grooves and deeper potholes. My poor car jerked and wheezed. This did not bother the men as they sat in the back munching on the raspberry and lemon-filled danishes they brought with them from the restaurant; they shared a large plastic cup of coffee passing it back and forth as the car carried them closer to our first destination.

"Ada read her poetry here," I thought. "And afterward she and Starkman might have snuck away into the woods and made love." I blushed, embarrassed at my own erotic thoughts.

We learned from a sign at the entrance gate that Camp Gornisht (meaning Camp Nothing in Yiddish, a joke, no doubt) would not open until July fourth. There were No Trespassing signs tacked around on several

trees. This didn't daunt Starkman. He and Agurski leapt out of the car and before I'd shut off the engine they were running down a road shouting, "Come, come, they have a lake, a lake."

"What about Ada?" I yelled back.

"Ada, Ada, Ada," Starkman chanted. "She loved to go canoeing, canoeing, canoeing."

There was nothing to do but follow them. They cut through some thick underbrush and there before us was a charming little lake encircled by light green trees still fresh in the early summer morning. It was only ten o'clock. A fine mist lay on the water. Birds chirped. Paradise.

Two beautifully painted canoes were drawn up on a tiny pebble beach. Shiny azure blue with light grey stripes. Amazingly, Starkman pushed one boat into the water with his cane while Agurski held it long enough for both of them to board. With one enormous stroke Agurski pressed the oars into the shallow water and off they went shimmering toward the opposite shore. They began to sing.

"What about me?" I shouted. Silence.

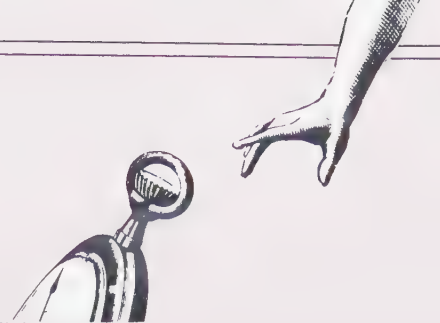
I thought of taking the second canoe and following them but there were no more oars. So I sat down on the pebbles, feeling the warm sun on my face. I waited and waited. Occasionally I would stand up and wave my arms at the little boat with its two tiny men across the lake. No response.

"Shit, piss, damn. What a waste of time this is." I felt sorry for myself.

When they got back after more than an hour I was really mad but I held it in.

"You look beautiful standing there on the shore," Starkman said, handing me a bunch of orange wild flowers. "Remember, we're old, we don't have a car, we never go anywhere."

"Did you and Ada come here?" I asked, letting out some of my pent-up frustration by using a sarcastic tone.





"Ada? Oh, yes. We must leave. Livingston Manor closes for visitors about twelve o'clock," he said, ignoring my implicit accusation.

It was a little after one o'clock when we arrived at Livingston Manor Institute For Psychiatric Rest, a large ornate brick building which probably once had served as a city hall sometime around the turn of the century. The windows were boarded up; the place was deserted. Nettles grew up the sides of the walls. There were dandelions along the edges of the building and there was the strong smell of rot.

"Ada lived here for thirty years?" I asked Starkman looking directly into his eyes.

"It's not my fault," he said as if he were annoyed with me. Then he kept repeating, rhetorically, again and again: "How could I be such a fool?"

Agurski comforted him by patting his back and saying: "No way you could know. Mental hospitals are supposed to last forever."

Mournfully, we drove back to the city and I dropped Starkman off at his West Side apartment. He had been silent the entire way back but as he climbed out of the car, touching his cane against the curb, he half turned to me and whispered, "Ada was a wonderful girl. I lost so much."

"You're full of bullshit," I exploded. "You never had anything to tell me."

"Such a big mouth," he shouted back.

"You're a phoney, a stupid phoney," I ranted and I felt my heart beat rapidly in disgust and embarrassment.

"You're all alike, American-raised, no respect. No patience left in the world. Don't come to see me anymore," he sputtered into the car window and he turned to limp through the double doors, now manned by a black doorman in an elegant uniform.

Agurski kept shrugging his shoulders as we crossed Central Park. Apparently lost in his own thoughts, he sat next to me saying nothing. As I pulled up to the building on Madison Avenue I could see the brass glint of the sign, "Archives of the Jewish Radical Literary Society."

"Not everything works out," he said as he left. "Don't be sad. There are other writers. You'll find them."

I drove around the corner and found a metered parking place on the crowded street. Then I walked to the corner where I bought a two-dollar double chocolate cone at the posh ice cream parlor. I ate it in the overheated car, thinking all the while that I would just forget this article.

But usually I never give up. So I got out of the car and walked back into the Archives, hoping to find Agurski and tell him I'd be willing to interview other people if he knew anyone.

The reading room was empty although the door was open and Agurski's travelling cap and the remnants of a brown bag lunch lay on the paper-cluttered table. I heard the toilet flush down the hall and then the sound of Agurski's quick footsteps accompanied by the little clicking sounds made by his snapping fingers. He was shocked to see me.

"No, sit still," he said as I awkwardly jumped to my feet. "Are you in love with me?" he asked.

"You are very lovable," I said feeling confused by this misunderstanding and by my own rush of undefinable emotion.

"You want me to rescue you. Find Ada. Write your article. Impossible. I'm too old."

We sat in silence, weary, staring at one another. And I thought or rather I felt about Ada and how she had rotted in the Livingston Manor—maybe because Joseph loved Clara, or maybe because her one book got a bad review, or maybe because she'd slept with Starkman and he'd bought those paintings I saw on his walls and didn't pay her enough for them and never gave them the exhibition he promised.

"I don't want to be like Ada," I whispered hoarsely.

"You are another generation," Agurski replied as he shook his head. "In some ways worse, in some ways better. Don't worry. You'll never be like her."

"You know, Agurski, I don't really want to write about her," I said, suddenly having the most wonderful sense of freedom. "I'll find another subject."

He laughed as if I'd made a witty joke. Then he gathered the lunch bag and some books and newspapers from the table and put them into a department store shopping bag. "O.K.

I have my Sunday reading material. I must go home," he said. "Walk with me to the subway."

"I'll drive you home," I offered but he shook his head and said he liked to read on the train.

We walked along Madison Avenue in the June heat and turned down Eighty-sixth Street to the long blocks to the subway.

"Ada was just one. There were so many like her," he said as we shook hands at the entrance to the underground staircase. And he handed me a large heavy envelope. Across the top it said: "Correspondence: Amos Starkman, 1930-1950."

"Look," I said impetuously, "why don't I write you a love letter?"

"Everybody writes me love letters," he smiled like a mischievous boy. "You are a real *mentsch*," he added. He was about to say something else but thought better of it as he descended into the darkness of the subway.

That night I opened the envelope and found about fifty letters from Ada to Starkman between 1940 and 1950. Bitter letters in which she accused him of seducing and abandoning her. He had taken her paintings and her dreams. He had led her into madness, she told him. There was one poem among the letters. Not her own but an English translation of a sonnet originally written by a Yiddish poet, Fraydel Shtok. Ada had translated the poem and Starkman had written in the margin: "For such a crazy lady it's not such a bad translation." The translation read:

*You wear your heart within your  
silent eyes,  
always there, to  
remind me of  
my many sins, that  
punish you  
and already bend your proud  
head  
into submission.  
Am I really worth those silent  
eyes of yours?*

I cried. I cried with my feminist sensibility and some deep part of me knew I could never rescue Ada from that oblivion into which she had been trapped. Then I thought, gratefully, maybe she has rescued me. □

*Norma Fain Pratt is a Los Angeles college history and humanities professor who also writes short stories and plays.*

## GROUPS AND PROJECTS

The Board of Jewish Education in Baltimore, MD, is sponsoring a "Jewish Lamaze Experience," childbirth preparation within a Jewish framework. The course will include lamaze training by a professional, discussion by community rabbis of baby-naming and birth ceremonies, birthing options, and more. The course will be offered September 8-October 27, and the cost is \$50 per couple. Registration must include a permission slip from your doctor. For more information or to register, contact:

**Rena Rotenberg**  
Board of Jewish Education  
5800 Park Heights Ave.  
Baltimore, MD 21215

The 92nd Street Y in New York is offering a unique program for those afflicted with Alzheimer's Disease. The program takes place three days a week and the Alzheimer's client participates in individual and group activities designed to maintain and strengthen his or her ability to continue in the functions of daily life, to remain a part of the community, and to enjoy living. For information on admission, call:  
**Anita Kane, Director**  
(212) 860-7012

## PUBLICATIONS

Biblio Press has just published the revised edition of "The Jewish Woman Biblio-

graphy: 1900-1985" compiled by Aviva Cantor. It includes the first edition of 1979 with corrections and additions, as well as an extended essay by the compiler on trends in Jewish women's writing and research. The cost of the book is \$9.25, and it is available from:

**Biblio Press**  
P.O. Box 22  
Fresh Meadows, NY 11365

The Woman's Institute for Continuing Jewish Education has available two books: "Midlife and Its Rite of Passage Ceremony" is a description of the transition made at midlife plus a midlife rite of passage ceremony; "The San Diego Women's Haggadah" is the story of the Exodus from Egypt which includes women's history and ceremony. To order these books, or for a list of other titles, contact:

**Woman's Institute for Continuing Jewish Education**  
4079 54th Street  
San Diego, CA 92105

## DRAMA, FILM, VIDEO, MUSIC

For information concerning rentals of "Partisans of Vilna," the film by Aviva Kempner covered in issue #16 of LILITH, contact:  
**European Classics**  
4818 Yuma NW  
Washington, DC 20016

Jewish Women in London Group, a feminist oral history project, has available a



YIVO

"Go and See" or "Seek Enlightenment" is the title of the Yiddish-language Torah for women, with the portion of the week and folk tales. Tsena-Rena was the first resource that enabled women to educate themselves.

tape-slide show called "Three Jewish Women." Through pictures and oral history interviews, three Jewish women describe their experience of being immigrants or daughters of immigrants. The program offers alternative images of Jewish women and breaks down the popular stereotypes of some Jewish women and the virtual invisibility of others. Its aims are to raise questions about Jewish women's identity and about the experience of being an immigrant. It, therefore, suggests links with other ethnic minority groups in England. For information about booking the program, contact:  
**Jewish Women in London Group**  
Southbank House  
Black Prince Road  
London, SE1 7SJ  
England

Judy Goldstein commemorates the 100th anniversary of the death of Emma Lazarus, American Jewish poet, in song and narration in Yiddish, Hebrew, Russian, and English. For terms and dates, contact:

**JWB Lecture Bureau**  
15 East 26 Street  
New York, NY 10010  
(212) 532-4949

## CALLS FOR MATERIALS

The Woman's Institute for Continuing Jewish Education is planning a 2nd Edition of "Taking the Fruit: Women's Tales of the Bible," which is a collection of modern *midrashim*—short explanations of biblical passages. If you would like to submit your work to be considered for the book, the deadline is March 1, 1988. For further information, please write to:

**The Woman's Institute for Continuing Jewish Education**  
4079 54th Street  
San Diego, CA 92105

For a book on the Yiddish "Shund" Theater in New York (1884-1918) the author would like to locate photographs of scenes from the plays, actors, etc. If you have access to, or know of, such photographs, please contact:

**Ilana Bialik**  
YIVO Institute for Jewish Research  
1048 Fifth Avenue  
New York, NY 10028  
(212) 535-6700, ext. 54

# TAKING THE LAW INTO OUR OWN HANDS

For thousands of years, no matter where Jews lived, their lives were guided by *halacha*, Jewish law (a word deriving from the Hebrew verb for "to walk"). Like a Constitution though covering the *whole* range of human experience, *halacha* has grown, changed and evolved by a process in which decisions on individual cases or questions became precedents and thus, "law."

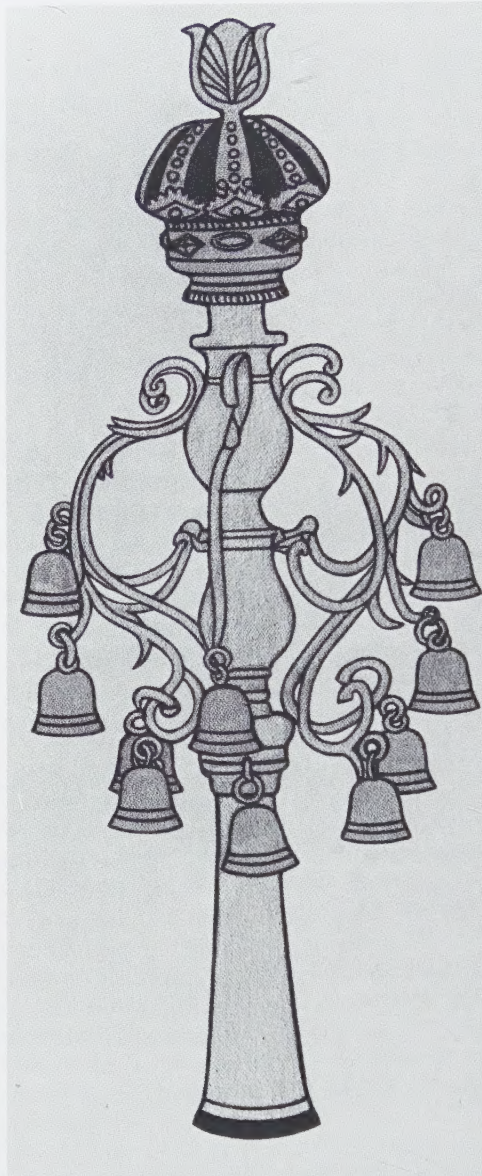
The process of *halachic* decision-making has generally involved an individual's submitting a question to a rabbi (or by a rabbi to a well-known sage, if the question was thorny enough) for a decision or "responsum" (pl.: responsa) from such a religious arbiter.

Although many of the questions and answers or responsa concerned women's lives, both as Jews and as women, women were never officially designated or regarded as religious arbiters. *Halacha* has thus lacked input from a women's perspective and is to a certain extent unresponsive to women's needs.

With the development of a body of Jewish women scholars conversant with *halacha*, it is now possible to change this situation—radically.

One might ask: why bother in this day and age to repair a system that has been unresponsive to women's needs, certainly to *modern* women's needs? The answer might lie, in the final analysis, in love of Torah, of Jewish law and learning, from the Five Books of Moses, to the Talmud, to the Codes and the hundreds of volumes of responsa (most of them, incidentally, now on computer).

As Judge Learned Hand once observed, law is a great educator. *Halacha*, because it covers areas beyond even common law, has shaped and formed Jewish life and culture (in the anthropological sense of the term) for 5,000 years, defining what behavior and practices are "Jewish." Whether one observes *halacha* in its entirety or partly or not at all, we are all nonetheless deeply affected by it whether or not we know it or wish it. And the principles



*Torah headpiece painted by Ruth Dunkell from an original in silver and gilt, made in Amsterdam in 1703, in the collection of the Jewish Museum, New York.*

and values on which *halacha* is based, which it anchors and solidifies in deeds, are as important and relevant and meaningful today as they were thousands of years ago.

Moreover, *halacha* has built-in mechanisms of change, of responsiveness to different situations, that were always employed to deal with

new problems—whether in the Golden Age of Spain or Poland under the Czars.

The problem, therefore, is not with *halacha* itself but with those who have appointed themselves today's religious arbiters. Fearful of change generally, and of that relating to women in particular, they have frozen *halacha* into ossification and then called that frozen fossil "*halacha*."

It is time for a change, for new leadership, new interpretations, new religious decisions.

With this in mind, LILITH has decided to launch a column of questions and answers on issues covered by *halacha*. Since the areas *halacha* deals with range from civil and criminal law to holiday observances to personal relationships, such questions—which we invite you to submit—can cover a vast territory. We expect that most of them will deal with issues that are particularly relevant to women's lives because it is these areas that have been most ignored and undeveloped. Questions should be as specific and detailed as possible. Names, of course, will be withheld upon request.

Our religious arbiters will be women scholars of note whose responsa will, we hope, create new precedents and open new vistas in *halachic* development. In time, we hope as well, their decisions will be incorporated into the stream of *halacha*, helping to break the log-jam and allow Jewish law to flow freely and be a fountain of life once more.

—A.C.

## Please send questions to:

*Taking the Law Into  
Our Own Hands  
Lilith Magazine  
250 W. 57th Street  
Suite 2432  
New York, NY 10107*

\*The idea for this column came from Dr. Irene Fine, Director of Jewish Studies of the Women's Institute for Continuing Jewish Education in San Diego, which is also earmarking economic support for it.

# THE WOMEN'S GALLERY



An expert in fiber arts, Ita Aber's ritual objects—Torah covers and ark curtains among them—are used in synagogues and private homes all over the world. Based in New York, Aber is a founding member of the Pomegranate Guild of Judaic Needlework and author of **The Art of Judaic Needlework**.

Aber invents contemporary expressions for historical women's symbols and often infuses contemporary ritual designs with feminist content.

Shown here is a dress, created for a baby-naming ceremony, embroidered with a phrase from the Torah portion read the week the girl was born. Aber suggests that the parents rework the dress into a Torah breastplate to be used at their daughter's Bat Mitzvah.

Below is a sculpture based on the V-form often associated with "woman" in early Sumerian cultures. Aber has used this symbol in fabric designs and on stationery announcing her own adult Bat Mitzvah ceremony.



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